A Fumbling Play

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at https://archiveofourown.org/works/77883806.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hazbin Hotel (Cartoon)
Relationship:	Alastor/Vox (Hazbin Hotel)
Characters:	Alastor (Hazbin Hotel), Vox (Hazbin Hotel)
Additional Tags:	Human Vox (Hazbin Hotel), Human Alastor (Hazbin Hotel), Human Alastor/Human Vox (Hazbin Hotel), Murdermedia - Freeform, Friends to Lovers, Idiots in Love, Misunderstandings, Pining, Fluff, Fluff and Humor, Alternate Universe - Human, Period-Typical Homophobia, Period-Typical Racism, Murder, Cannibalism, 5+1 Things
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2026-01-18 Completed: 2026-03-16 Words: 26,314 Chapters: 6/6

A Fumbling Play

by FalseDreamer

Summary

Alastor believed it was going rather well.

"*What?*" Vincent repeated again - he had such a way with words when he was on air so it was undeniably laughable how quickly it all fell away under pressure. "Alastor, we've been dating for two months!"

Like a record scratching, Alastor's mind came to halt. Every thought of reassurance and affirmation shattered as he was left with that same single word.

"*What*."

Or: 5 times Vincent *thought* he was dating Alastor, and 1 time Alastor took him on a real date. (Murdermedia / Human AU)

Chapter 1: 1

Chapter Summary

Alastor reminisces about his budding friendship with Vincent Whittman, and Vincent attempts to make it into something more.

Chapter Notes

CW: Racism and homophobia throughout the whole fic.

And wet dog Vox painfully misinterpreting situations.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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"Hey, Al! Take a look at this."

Alastor swayed on his feet, trying his best to keep up with his enthusiastic colleague as they trekked, half-lit, through the property's extensive gardens.

For the last half year, he and Vincent had been co-hosting a radio show together, conducting interviews and advertising new picture shows. It wasn't exactly Alastor's usual style, nor was it his preference, but when given an ultimatum between losing his dream job and selling himself out, he'd been forced to choose the latter.

"There's hoofprints in the mud!"

Vincent, who was currently leant into his shoulder as to keep them both upright, was the only reason Alastor wasn't fired to begin with.

It was pure luck that the other man was in the same corridor those months ago, allowing him to overhear how Alastor was "A good asset, but we all knew it was never goin' to stick. Not with you being a…"

Their boss never had the chance to finish that sentence, for a freshly hired, particularly scrappy Vincent had jumped in between them.

“You’re Alastor? Alastor from Smiles n’ Static?” And he proceeded to gush so hard that their hardened boss was almost startled away. “Incredible - simply incredible. I’ve never heard a voice quite like yours! I’ve been glued to my set ever since. You’re actually the reason I thought to apply here - otherwise I’d have chosen a path in television - my father’s always said I have the face for it, but there’s only so many ways to say that the sun’s out.” He had held himself tall and proud, despite his bumbling words. “My name’s Vincent Whittman. You’ll know that name one day, I swear it, sir.”

Alastor had *already* known the name - it was hard *not* to know the Whittmans. They were old-money; descended from early settlers who’d traded on their boats for mercantile wealth, and spent it on a shot at becoming ‘landowners’ in the ‘New World’. The land didn’t work itself, of course, and it - along with those forced to labor there - was choked of any prosperity they might ever have yielded.

The war had ended that arrangement, at least officially, and the Whittmans did not take their fall with any amount of grace. Their estates were carved up to settle debts, heirs lost the last of their riches to bitter nights of hollow pleasure, and remaining descendants had fled the state - preferring to avoid pleading their hopeless cases of violence and fraud in the courtrooms.

Despite this, the name continued to carry weight. Alastor gathered that Vincent must have been the son of the notorious *Mr* Whittman. A clever man who had laid low while his relatives unraveled, instead, putting those old family ships to use - supplying moonshine to the good working people - *unofficially*, needless to say. *Officially*, however, he dealt in much wiser investments. In fact, he was the one bankrolling Alastor’s station.

His boss, Mr Mammon, spoke highly of their investor, though it was obvious by the glare he shot at Vincent that his respect did not extend to the son.

He grumbled as Vincent shook Alastor’s hand between two of his own, “Best get it all out now. He’s goin’ his separate ways.”

“You’re quitting? What station are you moving to? Can I apply too? I only wish I could watch you record!”

Alastor let out a practiced laugh, regaining his smile to seize the silver plated opportunity. “It’s quite a pleasure to meet such an adoring fan. I’ve been rather taken by WLUX as of late - be sure to inform your friends!” ... *And your father*, he didn’t add, though Mr Mammon certainly heard it.

“Now, hold on-”

“I will! I’ll tell them all.” Alastor had a sneaking suspicion that Vincent was privy to his games, if the playful enthusiasm meant anything. “Are you going to their station now? I can take an early lunch break to ask for an interview?”

“That won’t be necessary!” Their boss scowled, already weighing his options. He knew Alastor’s show was popular - popular enough that he’d delayed the decision to sack him for far longer than he should have. But, reputations were fragile things, and should Alastor’s… appearance ever spark the public’s intrigue, he didn’t want to be responsible for handling the backlash.

Now though, it was bad enough hearing that his star would find a place with their rival company, but even worse that he was about to whisk away his new replacement and with it the company’s main source of income. He’d much rather *keep* that money funding *his* station. “In fact, I was just offerin’ Alastor here a new position.*”*

Given how much Vincent liked the mutt, he figured he could just *have him.* As long as it kept the cash rolling in.

“I hope you don’t mind sharin’, Vince!”

Their boss slapped Vincent on the back, tossing a challenging smile to Alastor, who grinned predictably in return. He explained to them that Vincent’s role had been switched to a two-man job so they could make the dynamic more interactive - better for putting their guests at ease. His reasoning had *some* grounds, but it was clearly all the ramblings of a desperately greedy man.

In Alastor’s previous position, his shows had only aired in the late evenings, sharing tales of unfortunate incidents and unsolved crimes, so he’d no need to be anything *but* unnerving.

However, this was the best he was going to get. There was no way WLUX would *actually* let a man like him through the door, given the mysterious and intimidating reputation of Mr Morningstar - he’d only used that station’s name to rile up his boss and reclaim his job.

“Wow, they’re tiny, do you reckon they’re from a fawn? Have you ever seen one?” Vincent couched down to inspect the prints, leaving Alastor standing wearily in his drunken state. He should’ve expected that the burlier man could hold down alcohol with more rigor. Alastor was well-toned but smaller in build, and easily weakened by only a couple shots of rye.

Working with Vincent turned out to be much more enjoyable than expected.

“It seems so, dear, and I’m quite the proficient hunter if I do say so myself.”

“You don’t shoot the babies, do you?” Vincent peered up at him from the ground - all big light eyes and admiration.

He was naive and excitable and so very privileged. All things Alastor never expected to enjoy in a companion. His only previous exceptions had been the delightful little ladies who bustled around him on his nights playing piano at speakies. But he found himself drawn in by Vincent’s hopeful trust in the world - fittingly, akin to a fawn finding its legs. So, he didn’t tell Vincent that *‘the babies’* made for the most tender of venison; that they were easier to find with their spotted backs, and they were often harvested simply to control the population.

“I should say not, that’d be poor form.” He lied. “I shall have to take you buck hunting one day.”

It wasn’t a serious suggestion - he was still apprehensive about the amount of time he’d been spending with the man - but by the way Vincent lit up, he couldn’t imagine being able to take it back.

Standing up and breathing into his cold hands, Vincent returned to his place beside Alastor and glanced back the way they’d come.

“You don’t think they’ll be upset that we left early, do you?” Vincent pondered with mild concern behind his clouded eyes.

The work party had been in honour of their investors, and held on the Whittman estate, so Vincent certainly had nothing to worry about. Only a fool would dare to threaten *him* with repercussions, especially when he would one day inherit the venue. As for Alastor…

“I hardly think they’d notice,” Alastor said. “I’ve disappeared from every one thus far and heard nothing as much as a whisper.”

“*I’ve* noticed.”

Alastor shouldn’t have been as surprised as he was. It was just… nice to finally have a colleague who respected him. He’d worked for the company for almost five years and had never so much as made a close acquaintance. Even before that, he’d never had people searching for him in a room or asking after him or - like tonight - drawing him aside and suggesting to get a breath of air together.

Still, he let the words linger in the cold air, his mind too hazy to find an appropriate way to express his gratitude.

“Well,” he sniffed instead. “Perhaps there hasn’t been much to entertain me.”

“Tonight was fun though,” Vincent objected. “I saw you hiding laughs at Adam’s rejection!”

Adam Dickson - a stocky buffoon of a man who had unfortunately secured a role at their station as music director - had spent the evening trailing after one very obviously uninterested telephone operator named Vaggi. Anyone with two eyes and a lick of sense could tell that she held no interest in the man, but that didn’t stop him in his approaches.

“A rare exception. And don’t think I didn’t see you doing the same.” Alastor argued, though he still thought back on the scene with glee.

Adam had planted himself in the centre of the hall and clapped his hands twice, signalling for his wing-woman to pause the music. Then, he called for Vaggi - vulgarly mispronouncing her name.

When the startled crowd parted around her, she made no move to step towards him, so Adam pulled out the big guns: he started miming with his hands, throwing an imaginary lasso around her and reeling it in. It was ever so awkward for all people forced to watch, especially

when his shoes squeaked against the floor in the otherwise silent room. Vaggi just turned away and took her blonde friend by the arm, leading her over to the bar while shaking her head all the way.

Adam had stomped his feet and made a fuss before taking off with his wing-woman, however Alastor had been more interested in the telephone operator. Vaggie had been just as worked up by the scene, but as the blonde girl touched a hand to her cheek and whispered in her ear, it all melted away at once.

Alastor had smiled behind a sip of his drink. He wasn't one for rumors - or worse yet, *displays of affection* - but he couldn't help himself from making a silent toast to their secret. It was always far more entertaining to root for the hopeless underdogs.

It wasn't long after that when the music returned and Vincent asked Alastor for a stroll.

The wind was cold and they were terribly drunk, so to stop bumping into each other, they simply walked along with touching shoulders. Vincent was always touchy in these ways, and Alastor had learnt to indulge him, lest he suffer the long disappointed looks.

"So, we've been co-hosting together for a while now." Vincent began, shuffling between his feet. "I don't know about you, but I've really enjoyed it - you're just- you're such an amazing host, and it's such an honor to work with you."

Vincent was always full of compliments like this, and it probably wasn't good for Alastor's ego to have grown so addicted to hearing them.

"*God*, sometimes I forget that I'm meant to be speaking as well, you just have such a way with words, Al."

Alastor had noticed this too. Often, he'd have to kick at Vincent's leg to snap him away from his *oogling*, though he supposed that was the risk when working with a fan.

"And I know it's risky business and you may not be interested in this kind of affair, but," Vincent fiddled with his hands and Alastor noted how they and his cheeks had turned a bright red against the biting cold. "I was wondering if you'd consider being partners?"

Starting up their own station as partners?

"Mr Whittman, that's quite the ask."

"I know, I know it's unconventional-"

Since Alastor was a young boy, he'd always dreamed of having his own radio station. Without anyone forcing him to say this or that; to speak freely about whatever topics crossed his mind and play whatever music happened to tickle his fancy that day. Though, there was one *small issue* that the world had long decided was a *big* issue.

“With all due respect,” Alastor tried to make his voice level and polite, despite his swaying body and suppressed frustration. “My being mixed makes it *rather more trouble* than that.”

“Not to mention the fact we’re both men - I get that, I do!”

Alastor wasn’t entirely clear on why their genders were relevant. If anything, their both being men was the only proper thing about the proposal. In honesty, he’d never even heard of a woman having any part in business ownership before - though many of the ones he’d met would be more than skilled enough to do so. (Rosie was another matter altogether, for her ‘business’ was still *technically* claimed under her long-deceased husband’s name, though the law was none the wiser regarding his death). For him, if his skin were a shade lighter, it may have been *possible* to *consider* it.

“But, forgetting all of that, just for a moment!” Vincent took him by the hands, excitement taking over logic as his mismatched eyes bore into Alastor’s. “We can find ways to work around it. We can take it slow and I promise to follow your lead.” He wasn’t entirely making sense, Alastor was fairly certain that *taking it slow* wouldn’t be important here. If anything, it was crucial to cease every opportunity that came their way as soon as possible. “But just answer me plainly, would you *like* to be my partner?”

“As a hypothetical?” Alastor considered for a moment. It was rare he thought it wise to share his dreams with others, and rarer still that he went through with it. “Of course I’d love to be partners, dear.”

“Yes! As a *hypothetical*.” Vincent winked at him obnoxiously, as though in on a joke that Alastor wasn’t aware of.

Fortunately (or perhaps unfortunately) for him, Alastor’s mind was easily distracted in his state, so he didn’t mention it. Instead, he peered behind his friend at the forest, not noticing how Vox’s lips puckered up, nor how he grasped Alastor’s hands tighter in his own.

They both leaned forwards, one man with his eyes closed and chapped lips eagerly waiting, the other man with his eyes set on the forest before him.

“Fireflies…”

Vincent opened his eyes, quickly following Alastor’s gaze to the trees. He supposed he *did* say they’d take it slow, and they *were* both far too drunk to enjoy the moment anyway.

“Uh yeah,” he released one of Alastor’s hands to slide next to him once more. “It’s pretty swell.”

He felt Alastor reclaim his position, leaning back into his shoulder. Although only an inch or two shorter than Vincent, his head was tucked into his coat collar, leaving the soft curls of his hair to graze against the taller man’s cheeks. Vincent wanted so badly to reach an arm around Al’s back and press their bodies together - if not to quell the cold, then to simply be closer.

“It surely is.”

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Chapter End Notes

They’re both dumb stupid idiots.

Vox is a himbo, nepo baby for this one. He doesn’t get angsty lore for my silly gay fanfiction concept.

This is intended to be set in the 1930s, but respect that it’s very historically dubious since I’m neither American (fortunately) nor a time traveller (unfortunately)

With that in mind, please lmk if there’s anything I should change, but otherwise I hope you enjoy <3

Chapter 2: 2

Chapter Summary

Vincent invites Alastor to watch a picture show together. Alastor believes this is all work related.

Chapter Notes

CW: Racism and/or homophobia

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Vincent was overjoyed.

Returning to the station the next week, he'd initially been shaking with anticipation, nerves jangling like loose wires. Maybe Alastor had only accepted his proposition because he was drunk. Maybe he'd come to regret it over the weekend or to be humiliated by the idea. Maybe he'd called the cops to have Vincent removed for his improper behaviour.

But none of that happened.

In fact, Alastor had yet to even mention the night's conversation at all. He'd just slid into his seat in the recording room, adjusted his notes, and fell back into their usual routine as if nothing had changed.

And God, they worked well together.

Vincent found himself staring a little more than usual - he couldn't help it, he just couldn't believe that Alastor had said yes.

"Thank you all for tuning in for tonight's broadcast," Vincent read his lines with practiced enthusiasm, staying professional despite his running thoughts. "We hope you'll join us tomorrow for more on Anthony Polvere's newest hit picture film. We'll be interviewing him next week for an exclusive on his character's rise from street crime to heroism."

“That’s right, listeners,” Alastor chimed in, perfectly on cue. “And now we leave you to enjoy your evenings with some Armstrong.”

Vincent exhaled as the show clicked to an end.

Technically, the role of choosing music was Adam’s, but neither of them were keen on ruining the mood with his *excentrics*. With some convincing, Mr Mammon had agreed to let them split the decision. From there, Vincent was kind enough to leave it to Alastor while also taking on the less subtle advertisements in their scripts - he hadn’t been asked to do so, but perhaps Vincent simply enjoyed their sponsored products that much. Personally, Alastor found it all rather uninspired but it kept clothes on his back and food in his and his mother’s stomachs.

As he made to follow his friend out of the recording room, Vincent paused and spun to face him, blocking him from leaving. With any other of their colleagues, this would put Alastor on edge - he’d had his fair share of less than friendly run-ins in empty rooms.

But with Vincent, he knew there was not a hint of malicious intent inside of that empty head of his, and he was likely going to suggest something stupid for him to be roped into.

“Hey Al! Maybe we should go watch Polvere’s movie together!”

There it was.

“Hm? Well, I suppose that could be beneficial." Alastor wasn’t one for cinema but if he *tried* to enjoy it, perhaps he’d have less to lie about on-air.

“Great, shall I book us in and I’ll meet you at seven? My father knows the owner of the theatre so I can get us the best seats!”

“Ah, just- please ensure that I won’t be… unwelcome.”

Vincent frowned, then gaped in realisation, and then frowned harder. “Right, right, no worries. The owner owes my dad some favors anyway so it won’t be an issue, I promise. Where shall I pick you up?”

“That won’t be necessary, I can make my own way.”

“Nonsense! I asked you out, it’s the least I can do.”

Alastor couldn’t argue with that without the risk of appearing rude. Besides, the night buses had a reputation for harbouring… unsavoury company.

“I suppose if you insist.” He reluctantly gave up an address in the Marigny, not too far from Washington Square.

“See you there,” Vincent said, “Seven o’clock, don’t be late!”

Alastor scowled at a loose string on his jacket as he waited out on the street for Vincent's transport.

His carefully slicked hair hid his curls from sight - something he didn't often do since everyone at the station already knew him, or knew *of* him through one rumor or another. It wasn't common for a Creole janitor from the river end of the Ninth to be offered a starring role speaking to live audiences across every state. Alastor was far from the norm in this respect, although it was only through a few careful planning and quiet… exertions… that he was able to secure such an unusual position. Since then, he was unashamed to hide himself and his success from his prying colleagues.

With the winter months rolling in, the dark was already settling in at seven but he still figured it worth making an effort - for Vincent's sake, rather than his own. If his friend had truly bent the picture-house rules **f**or the night, then he wasn't about to tempt fate by causing a scene.

Alastor recognised Vincent's car immediately, it was a familiar black Packard that was always parked up at the station. His dad's car, Vincent had confessed sheepishly when he'd been surrounded by eager colleagues. They all wanted a turn in being driven around the block, but when Alastor arrived and pushed himself through the station's doors, Vincent didn't hesitate to abandon his crowd and make his way to his friend's side.

Despite Alastor recognising and walking up to the car, the man still honked the horn and shouted from an unwound window, "What're you standing in the cold for? I was gonna knock on your door!"

Alastor slid into the passenger seat, "There was no need to make you wait on me. Regardless, I could hear your rust bucket churning down the street from a block away."

Truth be told, the engine was barely more than a purr. The real reason he'd risked hypothermia was for fear of having the man do just that: knock on his door. Or, more precisely, having Vincent knock on the door of the *random address* that Alastor had instinctively offered him earlier that day.

He wasn't ashamed of where he lived, and he'd happily choose it over anywhere else in the world, but… it wasn't exactly Vincent's scene. A white man would've been unusual there at night, sure, but a rich, big-named, old-money white man in a fancy car, being overly touchy with the neighborhood's local celebrity was bound to cause a commotion.

Alastor's ma was a member of the community women's sewing club and, from what he'd heard, they already had enough fuel to feed their gossip about her young, attractive bachelor son. There was no need to turn his objectively attractive co-worker into a potential suitor.

So, Alastor had regretfully made the long walk upriver.

Thankfully, Vincent wasn't too put out by Alastor's choice to stand outside, and as he slid into the passenger seat, he was instead questioned on another of his decisions.

“This is different,” Vincent poked a finger at Alastor’s hair. “I miss the curls.”

“As do I but I’m sure this look will sit better with the rest of the audience.”

“Oh.” Vincent turned the engine on distractedly, then shot back to attention as he realised the issue. “Say, Al, I didn’t mean to bring you out somewhere that makes you uncomfortable.”

“Not at all, Mr Whittman, it’s an honour to be joining you.”

It was true, he’d even informed his maman and she’d tucked a thorn-stripped rose in his breast pocket and patted down his suit *‘You’d best tell me all about it, young man. Your first big date at the picture show, do enjoy!’* She’d been quite disappointed to hear that it was not, in fact, a date, but she was still excited for him nonetheless. *‘Is your colleague handsome?’*

He’d never sat in the front of a car before, and it had been years since he’d sat anywhere in one at all. As a boy, his father had a rattly old Ford which he’d hired out as a hack to working ferry men around the city.

It was nice back then, having his father around - he was the one who taught Alastor how to smile and get his way. *‘Now son, don’t let them step on you,’* he’d told him when he first arrived at his school. *‘Just because those kids are bigger than you and look a little different, doesn’t mean you belong here any less.’*

The man didn’t survive to see Alastor through his teenage years, and he’d been forced to drop out when he no longer had a white man paying extra for him to attend.

Still, Alastor would always treasure his father’s lessons, and so he kept his head up as he walked beside Vincent into the theatre.

The theatre was packed. Apparently, the movie was much more popular with *lovers* than Alastor had anticipated. It’d seemed like an action movie from their radio scripts, but each present man had a lady hanging to his arm - except, of course, for him and Vincent who only walked beside each other.

There was another thing which separated them from everyone else, and it had hung plainly on a sign, posted just beside the door to the theatre.

Prompted by his partner’s hesitation, Vincent clarified. “Don’t worry, Al, my dad said he smoothed things over. We won’t be bothered.”

People often criticised Vincent for being unobservant or lost in his own head, but it was hard for him not to notice how the gathered peoples parted for him and his date. Alastor had done his best to fit the part, and by all accounts and standards he had succeeded. He was more than handsome enough, and plenty refined. If not for being a shade too dark, Vincent could’ve seen him in the director’s lounge, sharing drinks with the producers and consorting with

investors. Instead, he was being led along by Vincent's firm arm, and weaved past the other coupled guests.

They didn't make too much of a fuss, it was just the way their gazes hardened at the sight of them or they shuffled closer to their own partners for safety. Which was stupid because Alastor was the most honest, charming, beautiful, elegant, intelligent man that Vincent had ever had the pleasure of meeting. And now he got to date him and by God he was going to show the world, even if they didn't accept that in its fullest just yet.

"Popcorn?" Vincent asked, leading them towards the counter.

Alastor nodded and released Vincent's arm to fumble with his wallet. As he pulled out a few notes, he was stopped by his friend's hand resting on his (which felt like a strange thing to do to your colleague, but then again, it wasn't too unusual by Vincent's standards).

"What is it?"

"I'll buy it. I brought you here, after all."

"I believe you bought the tickets as well," Alastor said mildly. "You'll have to let me pay you back"

"Then I guess *you'll* have to ask *me* out somewhere next time."

Alastor raised a brow at the phrasing but allowed Vincent to guide his wallet back to his pocket. "I suppose we could share a bucket then?" It would come out cheaper that way - better than making Vincent spend more expenses on him unnecessarily.

Vincent looked absurdly pleased at this, stepping towards the counter to order their popcorn.

In that moment of separation, a tall man in a wide brimmed hat loudly made himself known, "You know, ladies," He drawled. "I've had a mighty fair share a' rodeos but you two must be the darn finest little sweethearts I did ever lay my eyes on." Beside him, the two women in question giggled, clinging each to an arm of the man.

Alastor barely had time to register him before a hard shoulder knocked into his.

"Make room, swamp rat. This ain't no parlor."

Alastor didn't stumble or react other than to smile wider and narrow his eyes. The man made a show of fixing his hat, silver hair catching the light. He smiled easily in return, looking all too natural on his strikingly weathered face.

Vincent, noticing the interaction, stepped back towards him and dragged Alastor closer so that they stood together once more. "Everything alright here, Al?"

They both glared at the man as he flirtatiously ordered a few drinks from the next till over.

"Nothing to worry about, Vincent."

“What a jerk.” Vincent replied, pointedly raising his voice. If the man noticed then he pretended not to, but he did flash a sneaky wink in their direction.

“Indeed.” Alastor wasn’t too bothered, it was expected. Although, it may be worth keeping an eye on that man - he may prove worthless to society but entertaining as *prey*. “Let's not allow him to ruin our night.”

For now, though, he wouldn’t let the man distract him from the matter at hand. Vincent had brought him here to improve their comments on tomorrow’s interview, and he had to show his gratitude for the opportunity.

Meanwhile, Vincent was just grateful that his date hadn’t been ruined by one nosey rat bastard.

They took their seats near the back of the theatre and Vincent placed their popcorn bucket onto Alastor’s lap. With it there, he had an excuse to periodically lean closer to his partner.

“He’s quite the dancer.” Alastor whispered as Angel - the protagonist’s codename - swung his partner around on the ballroom floor. The orchestra set the mood, creating loving croshendos with each tense step and sway.

“Yeah.” Vincent replied, though he couldn’t help but notice the actor’s feathery footsteps and exaggerated gestures. All of which made him appear a little awkward and out of place next to a female counterpart. “You don’t think he’s… like us, do you?”

“Us-?”

The room felt like it shook as the ballroom exploded. A bright light flashed across the theatre as Angel shouted a warning. When it ceased, they could see how the protagonist had shifted around his lover to protect her from the rubble.

Vincent whistled lowly, “How’d you think they filmed that?”

“Vincent what did you mean by like-”

“Shut ya traps down there!”

Ah. *Him*.

Vincent and Alastor turned in sync to glare. That had been the only issue with their date so far.

The rude man from earlier in the evening had managed to acquire a ticket for the seat directly behind them. He sat, sprawled out so that his knees touched the seats on either side of his own. His arms hung loosely over the backs of the chairs, allowing his hands to curl around the shoulders of the two ladies who he’d brought as dates.

In hindsight, Vincent should have asked his father to place them on the very back row. That way they'd have had more privacy…

"That guy sucks." he muttered.

On screen, Angel and his partner ran from the ruined building and pulled each other into a warm embrace. As they began to kiss, it signalled Vincent's chance.

The room was dark, and he'd been leaning in closer and closer each time he went to grab popcorn. The Texan would never notice it.

"There's an awful lot of kissing for an action film, do you not think?" Alastor mused beside him.

The character's hands started to roam their bodies, grasping at each other's clothes in desperation.

"Hm, but sometimes that just raises the stakes."

Vincent kept leaning in, and once he was certain of his destination, he closed his eyes in preparation.

Then.

Nothing.

The music perked up, with more instruments layering on, from violins to flutes to trumpets, followed by the loving sighs of the audience. All except for Alastor.

Vincent opened his eyes, blinking at the back of his date's head.

He was looking at that fucker again.

"Al?" He asked, accidentally letting his anger bleed through his tone.

Alastor spun sharply at the noise, knocking his head hard against Vincent's nose.

"Son of a bitch!" He shot backwards, covering his face.

"Christ, Vin! What were you doing so close?" Although it felt like he was being shouted at, Alastor was keeping his voice very low as not to disturb anyone. Vincent did not have the same priorities.

"You have a very hard fucking head!" Vincent could feel the blood gushing from his throbbing nose.

"We need to get you to a restroom."

"No! It's okay, this is a good bit!" Vincent watched in envy as Angel and his lover kept exploring each other's mouths on the screen.

Alastor stared at him doubtfully. “I guarantee this scene will do nothing to advance the plot in our absence.”

“But- but-” This was his chance. He’d done everything right-

“Quiet down, varmints.”

“Come on, Mr Whittman.” Alastor stood up, crouched slightly as not to block the screen for the other audience members.

Around them, Angel’s voice filled the room, *“You taste like heav’n sweetheart.”*

“Goddamnit…” he muttered, letting himself be dragged away.

Alastor’s hands were fast and nimble as he worked, and Vincent only wished they were exploring his body rather than his bloody - *hiss*.

“Sorry, dear. Maybe if you hadn’t been leaning so close to me this wouldn’t have occured.”

“I was-! Nevermind.” Vincent pouted from where he sat atop the dirty restroom sink as Alastor dabbed the alcohol to his wounded nose.

“Oh hush now, it won’t leave any scars on this pretty face of yours.”

Alastor patted his cheek and he leant into it, then almost fell as Alastor stepped away to wash his hands in the other sink. That didn’t stop Vincent from blushing and mumbling out a quiet, “Your face is prettier.”

“What was that?”

“Can we catch the rest of the movie now?” He said louder.

“I suppose. Hopefully we missed that terribly unpleasant scene.”

“Haha, yeah…”

Vincent jumped from the sink and grabbed Alastor’s hand to lead him back to their screen.

Only, as they left the restroom, they were met with one familiar angry Texan and a security guard.

“There.” He pointed. “Those are the fuckin’ queers! And see, that one ain’t even allowed in ‘ere.”

“Shit.”

Alastor knew he’d overstepped.

It was one thing to be allowed access into the picture house. It was another thing entirely to ignore the signs pointing towards the separate entrance, the designated balcony stairwell, and the segregated restroom. He'd been so caught up in following the confident cues of Vincent's blind ignorance, that he'd almost completely dropped his guard.

Meanwhile, Vincent didn't bother hiding their joined hands, and started pulling his partner towards the doors.

"I thought you said your father knew the owner?" Alastor asked, eyebrows furrowed.

"I missed out one detail."

After his last *experiment*, his father had explicitly told him that he wasn't to date another man. Or at least from his understanding, he couldn't be *caught* dating another man. Valentino was a golddigger anyway and it was hardly Vincent's fault he ended up in prison for snogging him on a very public bus. But he wouldn't let Alastor befall the same fate.

"What. Why would you fail to mention that?" Alastor asked, a little breathless from their running.

"Why do you think?"

Alastor felt somewhat betrayed. Vincent had definitely told him that he'd smoothed out the situation and that Alastor was allowed to sit with him despite his race. And now he was acting as though it were some obvious burden that he should've expected to come up. "You said that they owed your family!"

"Not *that* much!" Alastor didn't consider himself *'that much'* of an issue but he guessed he should've known better. "Come on, we have to go!"

They bolted through the doors and made their way into the Parkard. As Vincent stuck the car into reverse, Alastor could just about see the security guard speaking into his talkie by the doors.

Much of the ride home was quiet after that.

"Did you- did you enjoy the movie, Al?" Vincent tried, his face was scrunched in guilt and his hands were tight around the steering wheel.

"It was adequate." He'd still have to lie about it on their radio show, no matter his opinion. "Thank you for indulging me and I apologise for causing our hasty departure."

"Ah, it's not your fault. The world just sucks, right?"

"Yes. The world…" Or more specifically, that bigoted heckler who'd not stopped bothering them since they'd walked in.

At his destination, Alastor pushed his way out of the car in silence, “Bye Al, see you to-” and slammed shut the door.

That man had to *go*.

Vincent hit his head against the steering wheel, not noticing how Alastor didn’t walk into the house of the address he gave.

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Chapter End Notes

Here’s a diagram to summarise Alastor and Vincent’s dynamic this whole fic:
😚🦵 😃

Btw, named Angel Anthony “Polvere” because it’s Italian for “Dust”

Chapter 3: 3

Chapter Summary

> Alastor finds himself interrupted after hunting his victim. Vincent is just happy to be involved.

Chapter Notes

> ("Barbie has a good day every day, but Ken only has a good day if Barbie looks at him" ahh relationship)
>
> CW: Murder, implied cannibalism

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Silas Rattleson.

Or *'Striker'* as his *friends* called him.

That was the man who ruined Alastor's first trip to the movies. And that was the man whom Alastor had spent his following eight nights watching.

The hunt was always his favourite part. The thrill of pursuing his prey without their knowledge. The rush when they turned around midstep, only to find that the predatory eyes that chased them were merely figments formed from paranoia. It was all in their heads.

Now, *Striker* didn't have many friends - not that you'd know it from his overconfident demeanor. Most of the people who'd dubbed him as such were his clients and handlers. They met him in shooting ranges or found him lurking around the corners of streets and they spoke his silent language of grunts and twitching gestures. It was a careful exchange.

They'd offer him a cigar. He'd accept it. They'd smoke together for a moment, only tilting their heads in vague acknowledgement of one another's presence. Then, Striker would hold out a hand, money would be passed, and he would walk away with that disgusting arrogance.

But tucked in those expensive cigars was a hit. And Striker would return to the low-slung motor court he'd rented out in Gentilly, assemble his rifle, and set out to earn his salary.

He had quite the reputation and Alastor even learnt that he'd made rivals out of a local dog shelter. The shelter, although being a successful business, was a cover up for a less successful squad of assassins known as IMP. Alastor had seen them before, though *they* hadn't seen *him*, and he was confident that they'd pose as perfect scapegoats if it came down to it.

Striker's most recent job was easy enough to intercept, and so Alastor found himself passing between the shadows of trees to follow the man into position. His target was an aristocrat who'd been visiting from abroad to host a local festival. The strategy was clear enough - Alastor noticed that Striker's '*plans'* were always a straight forward hit and run. He'd find a spot in a nearby park, overlooking his victim, aim his trusty Winchester, then shoot. If his reputation served to be true, he never missed.

Today, Alastor would ruin that.

Before Striker could work the lever, Alastor pounced.

"What the- get back!"

"Hello there."

The rifle was solid walnut and steel - dubbed a man-stopper for more reasons than one - and hardly made for swinging around the way the Texan attempted. Still, Alastor let it point to his chest, confident that Striker was not one to shoot without asking questions first.

He was a hunter, just like Alastor.

They'd both been stalking their own prey - only, one of them was nature's apex.

"Now I recognise you, boy." That wasn't reassuring. Alastor preferred his victims to have no connections to him. Although, it wasn't like Striker had a name to add to his suspect. "I had been wonderin', what's a fine fella like you been doin' runnin' around with that blue-blood pansy boy?"

"You'd best save your compliments," Alastor drawled, letting his accent curl to mock the other. "I ain't no fine fella, *varmint*."

He advanced slowly, hands pleasantly clasped behind his back to conceal the knife.

Striker was starting to sense the threat, but he wasn't yet willing to give in. "Come now, there's no use noseying up to that Yankee by doin' his dirty work."

Without a word, Alastor kept walking.

The rifle tracked him until he stood with the barrel pressed to his chest. Striker was confident as ever, ensured that he had the upper hand.

“We both know he ain’t worthy a bossin’ you about. You found me all the way out here yurself, right, swampy?”

In one false move, Alastor hit the rifle aside and rushed forwards to push the man to the floor. Striker tried to hit him off with his gun, but Alastor stamped his foot to his wrist, pinning it until the man was forced to drop his weapon.

“Hey now!” Striker placated, quickly losing confidence. “We ain’t so different, you and I. Just gettin’ by the best we can.”

“Perhaps…” Alastor replied, easing his knife to Striker’s neck, eyes bright with peaked amusement as the man tilted his head back in a fruitless bid for time. “But I’m not killing you for him.”

He gulped. “Whatcha issue then? Hate to see a workin’ man with a thrivin’ business?”

“Not at-”

Having mustered his strength, Striker pushed hard against Alastor’s chest, somehow even stronger than he looked.

Before Alastor could react, Striker yelled out in pain.

He followed Striker’s gaze downwards. A knife pointed through his stomach from behind.

It wasn’t exactly classy. Personally, Alastor didn’t enjoy stabbing his victims in the back, but whoever had done it had allowed him the perfect view of Striker’s widened eyes.

Unfortunately, he hadn’t the time to relish the picture. Someone else was here.

He took his knife to the man’s throat holding it there just long enough to drawl out the word, “Goodbye,” without disguising his glee. Then he dragged the knife smoothly, turning flesh to meat, exposing fat and veins and muscle, layer by layer. Nearing the center, he was careful not to damage the larynx’s thick cartilage - Rosie liked to keep those parts to use as instruments. He wondered whether Striker’s cords would carry the same depth as his voice once cleaned and strung.

Usually, he’d draw out the suffering for longer, but he ensured Striker could do nothing but choke on the blood as it trickled from his sliced trachea, into his suffocating lungs. He didn't deserve to consider his final words. Alastor had wanted to finish that darn talkie.

He watched as the man clawed at dirt and tried to crawl towards him, but Alastor only shuffled his pointed shoes backwards, refusing to dirty up their polished surfaces with the man’s vile blood.

When he dropped still and Alastor took in a deep breath, inhaling the delicious smells of pine trees, blood, nature, and death.

The intruder was yet to make a move, but Alastor could see them moving through the bushes.

He crept through the shadows, tightly gripping his knife and-

“Oh my God, was that the guy from the cinema?!”

Vincent. *Shit*.

That would be harder to cover up than some simple hitman or random witness. Not only was he fond of the man, but they’d spent so much time together that he was bound to become the prime suspect.

“No way!” Vincent huffed out a laugh, and Alastor’s smile grimaced at the edges. “I came here to kill him too! His name is Silas, did you know that? I paid some guys for information on him.”

“... Oh?”

“Yeah! I mean, he ruined our night out so I just thought-” he waved his own knife around in a *‘so-so’* motion. “You might appreciate it if- I know it’s stupid but he *is- was* an asshole.”

“So you were going to kill him?” Alastor eyed the knife. He ought to have taken Vincent by the wrist and twisted until the knife fell to the ground, but it strangely didn’t seem all that necessary.

“I did kill him! I didn’t think you’d be here too though, crazy coincidence!”

Alastor hesitated. It’d been so long since he’d hesitated on a hunt. “You’re a murderer?”

“So are you!” He reached out his arms in a wide arch, celebrating as though he’d found out they went to the same High School, as opposed to discovering that they were both homicidal criminals. “I’ve only killed a *few* people, I swear. Usually I plan it out more but this guy ruined our whole night so I just couldn’t help myself.”

Alastor nodded slowly, letting his knife hand hang loosely by his side.

“Well then,” Vincent clapped, still excited by the chances of it all. “I guess we’ve done the fun parts but do you need a hand with the clean up?”

“That would be appreciated, dear… did you bring any bags?”

“I’ve got a shovel in the car!”

The idiot parked his car nearby?

“That won’t do. We shan't be burying him.”

“Oh man, but my dad will kill me if he has to cover up another murder…” he stared at the bleeding corpse in dismay.

Alastor sighed deeply. *What the hell was wrong with this man?* “Come here, I’ll tell you where to start.”

And so he spent the next twenty minutes talking his colleague through the best places to get clean cuts on limbs, the most efficient way to bag them, and the most important parts to leave undamaged.

About halfway through the process, Vincent thought to ask, “Why are we doing this?”

“It’s far easier to hide a body when there’s nothing left to hide, my dear.”

“Right…” Vincent looked to the leaking bags.

There was *definitely* still a body left to hide, and he wasn’t entirely certain why chopping it into such orderly parts was going to make it any more difficult to identify. If it were him, he would’ve done everything he could to smash up the corpse until it was utterly unrecognisable. But as he looked over to his partner’s face, bright-eyed and full of energy, he couldn’t bear to tell him that his effort was in vain.

It was nice to spend time with him - indulging a hobby he thought he’d never get to share with anyone at all. And he got to spend it with the love of his life, no less! There was something incredibly invigorating about that kind of connection, held by secret passions and shared exploits.

Vincent watched as Alastor swung his knife into the corpse’s neck, fishing out part of its windpipe for a separate bag, then finishing off the deadly laceration from before. A stray stream of blood flew out from what must have been a severed artery, and droplets splashed delicately onto his lover’s face. He looked so beautiful that way.

The sleeves of his black shirt were rolled up to meet his red vest, showing off muscles that Vincent hadn’t known were there. He stood with a sigh to admire his work and wiped the back of a hand across his face, unintentionally smearing the streak of blood across his cheek.

“Feeling alright, Vincent?” *Ah*, Alastor had caught him staring.

“Yes, it’s just… so pretty out tonight.”

Alastor indulged his half-lie with a hum, assuming the ease at which he tidied his kill was making his friend queasy.

“But uh- what now?”

“I’ve got a friend not too far who buys the bones. I can manage the walk alone.”

“Don’t worry about it, my car’s not far.” *And hopefully hadn’t been spotted.*

“If you insist, dear.”

Alastor was right - the park was just South of his friend's business in Carrollton.

"Are you sure he'll be in? It's pretty late." Vincent had asked while he loaded the corpse into his trunk.

*Alastor watched on with a slow drag of his cigar. "*She'll *be in."*

His friend was apparently a seamstress, and with each step towards the tall, red-brick building, Vincent grew more uncertain about dragging some poor lady into their macabre enterprise.

The structure was elegant, with wrought-iron balconies and arched windows. In the daylight, he could imagine how the cobblestoned entryway would fill with guests, bustling to have their dresses fixed or suits tailored. Now that the night had set in, the stones only served to reflect the ominous glow of brass lamps, and threatened to catch on unwary feet if given the chance.

Then there was Vincent, who was carrying the rotting remains of a man right to her polished doorstep.

"And you're sure she's alright with this?"

His partner sighed, having reassured him more than enough times already.

Without answering, he pushed open the double doors in one deliberate motion. Vincent rushed to drag the bags inside after him.

"Alastor!" A warm voice greeted before the doors had even closed. "It's lovely to see you, I see you brought a friend - how unusual!"

Vincent met her tone with a bow, "Hello ma'am!" and placed his lips to her offered hand.

"And so polite! Is he here for dinner or as a guest?"

He wasn't quite sure if it was a strange way to word the question, but he looked to Alastor anyway for an answer.

"No, no. Vincent, meet Rosie Darling. Rosie, this is Vincent Whittman." It was nice to finally meet one of Alastor's friends, no matter how unusual. He could only hope that they could drop by someday as proper guests, without endangering the woman any further. "We've just prepared a delivery together and were hoping to clean up before the sun comes out."

"Sure thing, honey, you know the way. I'll have my girls bring the goods through."

"Thank you, dear."

Alastor gestured for Vincent to drop the bags, so he left them by the counter and caught up to him with a light jog.

“She seems nice.” He looked over his shoulder, now wary of those other *‘girls’* who were apparently in on it. “Do you *deliver* for her a lot?”

“Only when I deem it necessary. She’s ever so thorough with hiding the evidence.” Alastor guided them around a corner, then into a staff restroom.

“Wow. Usually I just bury them.” Alastor turned on the tap to wash his hands, so Vincent spoke louder. “It’s not so great when they get found though - it was pretty hard for my father to cover it up when I hid one in our gardens.” He laughed at his own stupidity. He’d since learnt to properly scout out areas to bury bodies in beforehand, and hadn’t been caught since. The whole selling bones thing was a little worrying to this plan. “I’d rather he not find out that I killed another person though.”

Alastor raised a brow at him as he dried his hands. “I see... In the future, maybe leave it to me when you want someone killed.”

“Hey! That’s the fun part.” Not to mention how thrilling it was to watch Alastor slice through flesh with his precise composure. The sweat glistening against his cheekbones, and the blood catching in his curls. “How’s about we do it together instead?”

“Very well, dear.”

“Here’s your fill, sweety. Cook you and your man something nice.”

Rosie passed a few wrapped parcels over to Alastor. They looked too irregular to be filled with cash, but Vincent decided that it must’ve been part of the disguise. He also wasn’t clear on why Rosie was paying Alastor so much when she’d been the one hiding the body as a favor. Perhaps the bones were worth more than he thought.

“Thank you dear, though I don’t believe Mr Whittman would be especially keen on trying my meals.” Alastor replied, a genuine smile tugging his lips.

“I’d love to!” Even before Vincent found his love for men, he’d always imagined him and his partner sharing a kitchen together, cooking and chatting about their days. Then, his partner could laugh at how horribly he cut the vegetables, and they’d take his hand and guide him through it. By the end of the day, he could tuck in to a homemade meal with his love by his side. “Maybe we could make it a picnic?”

“A picnic?” Rosie looked very pleased so Vincent continued.

“Yes, in my gardens with the fireflies!”

“What a splendid idea!” She chimed with a small clap of her hands.

Alastor was slightly less enthusiastic. “Just how many bodies have you buried in that garden?”

“We can avoid those spots.” Vincent reassured. *That wasn’t what Alastor was worried about.* “Maybe you could teach me how to hunt as well?”

Ah, Alastor understood. Vincent only wanted to get him somewhere quiet so that he could learn to fend for himself. That was just fine by him.

“In that case, I’d be more than happy to assist.”

“Perfect! Let me drive you home!” Vincent added, laying a hand onto Alastor’s shoulder. “Thank you for having us, Mrs Darling!”

“Just Miss will do fine.” She corrected with a knowing wink sent to Alastor. “You’re far too sweet, young man. You take care of our Alastor now.”

“Don’t worry ma’am, I’ll keep him out of trouble!”

“Not too much, I hope. I do enjoy his deliveries.”

Whilst driving, Vincent distantly wondered why Rosie was so pleased about receiving the corpse, but he was sure it was just an eccentric murderer quirk. He never claimed to be entirely sound of mind himself, and he was certain that other people with similar hobbies were in the same situation.

Still, “She’s nice.”

“Yes… did you truly wish to try our food?”

“Sure, why not?” The question was rhetorical, but given how unsure his partner sounded, Vincent wouldn’t have minded an answer. “When’re you free?”

“I’ll make the time this weekend, before the meat goes rotten. I’ll be sure to call on you.”

Alastor left the car, carrying the packages of money, and he stayed standing on the sidewalk until Vincent pulled away.

Chapter End Notes

Vincent: omg you wanted to kill this guy for me?!? That’s so cute tysm!!!!

Alastor (debating whether to stab Vincent): yes… it’s cute…

Hopefully my lack of gun knowledge isn't too obvious. I ran with my google search on "What guns cowboys use?" and apparently the Winchester Model 94 is also known as a deer rifle which is pretty fitting.

Chapter 4: 4

Chapter Summary

Alastor shares his unique dietary habits with Vincent whilst having a questionably romantic picnic.

Chapter Notes

CW: Cannibalism (described too casually)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Alastor knocked on the Whittman manor doors. It was his first time there since the work event six weeks ago, and given what he was carrying, he was rather anxious about being questioned.

If it turned out to be another cinema incident, wherein the hosts were not informed that he was mixed, Alastor might just have to strangle Vincent.

It was strange to see such a glamorous building and find it so lacking in staff - no gatekeepers or gardeners or butlers crossed his path on the long walk down the twisting driveway. Even so, the front yard was well-maintained, and the house had lost none of its grandeur with the years.

Despite the gate being open, the fine bushes that lined the road seemed to detest his movements, curling inward over the route. The entrance was clearly intended to be driven on - whether by horse-drawn carriages when it was first built, or present day motors, like the Duesenberg and Marmon, which were parked beside Vincent's car outside the doors. Still, nobody made to stop Alastor as he strode on.

Surprising him more, it was the owner of the house who greeted him personally at the door.

Alastor supposed this was what became of you when your house hid so many secrets; he wondered how many maids had discovered a stray bottle of alcohol beneath a floorboard, stashes of wrapped cash slotted behind a painting, or unregistered firearms hidden in bookshelves - before the entire staff was removed.

“You must be Mr Hartfelt. My son’s spoken quite highly of you, young man.”

Mr Whittman had an upper Southern accent, just bordering on Tidewater. The polished intrigue that fell from beneath his frown gave the impression that one was being interrogated, though his crinkled eyes and red-dusted cheeks told a different story.

“Mr Whittman, it’s quite the pleasure to make your acquaintance.” Alastor reached out a hand, testing the extent of the man’s welcome.

Vincent’s father didn’t hesitate to shake the offered hand, though he didn’t stop there. He used the movement to push himself forwards, positioning himself close to Alastor’s ear as though they were old pals sharing a friendly half-hug.

Alastor fought the instinct to swing at him.

It wouldn’t create the best impression if he punched his friend’s dad, and boss’ boss within seconds of meeting.

Mr Whittman spoke in that calm, practiced tone.

“Now, don’t let our Vincent pull you into anything… unwise. He’s always had a talent for mischief.”

The truthful response would be to tell the old man that he was about to introduce his son to the joys of eating human flesh; that he had organs baked into pies, and muscles chopped, seasoned and scattered atop rice, all neatly wrapped up in boxes and hidden beneath a blanket in his basket. And that he and Vincent had killed a man to acquire it.

So instead, Alastor smiled, nodded and stepped out of Mr Whittman’s grasp the second he had the chance, fixing his grip on the basket’s handle.

“Of course, sir. I would hate to lose my valued co-host.”

It wasn’t quite a threat - Alastor wouldn’t dare try something like that - but he figured it got the point across that he knew the sort of trouble Vincent got into. That it was the kind of thing he *ought* to be locked away for, and that if Vincent were to drag *him* into trouble, he wouldn’t be going down alone. Not without a fight at least - they both knew he had little hope in a legal battle.

What he didn’t expect was the chuckle that left the old man, “Your co-host, hm? Is that the term he’s settled on?” And Alastor got the sudden feeling that they were having two separate conversations. He wondered what it was about this family and their constant failure to read situations.

“Yes?”

There wasn’t much else he could say to that. They *were* co-hosts after all. Perhaps Mr Whittman simply wasn’t that interested in his radio station investment.

That, or Vincent was even less tight-lipped than he anticipated. Maybe what he meant to ask was if the co-hosts were really co-*conspirators*.

“Alastor!”

He turned to see Vincent hurrying down the stairs, fumbling to put his arms through his coat sleeves.

“You’re here!” Given how they’d discussed the picnic after finishing a recording just the day before, Alastor wasn’t sure why Vincent was so surprised. “How was the trip over? Not too much trouble I hope.”

“None at all!” Alastor reassured, shuffling a little further away from Vincent’s father.

Vincent had offered to drive him, but he figured he would save him the hassle by taking the trolleys - it’s not like Vincent knew where he *actually* lived, so it was inconvenient either way.

What he didn’t account for was the fact that the Whittman estate sat outside of the city, and once he’d made some distance past the Mississippi, he was pushing beyond the end of the streetcar lines. After all, anyone rich enough to afford property by that road was bound to have enough generational wealth to buy all the cars they wanted. Which meant that Alastor found himself cutting across the adjoining bottomland for almost an hour, heading in the general direction of the manor.

Now knowing that Mr Whittman had his suspicions about him, Alastor was somewhat regretting making the effort.

Vincent didn’t seem to notice the way his smile strained with exhaustion, and continued towards the door, “So I know you liked the spot last time but there’s another great spot just out past the fence.”

“Vincent, do see that Mr Hartfelt gets a drink before you carry him away.” Mr Whittman said, managing to relieve and unsettle Alastor at the same time.

Here it was.

Through his own thoughtless stupidity, Vincent had set up Alastor’s arrest. What had he said? *‘Oh, my job? It’s going well, my co-host is great. Also, we killed a man the other day!’* Stupid. Alastor was *stupid*. Trusting that idiot.

“Now, how’s the family, Mr Hartfelt?”

Stalling.

The old man was stalling and Alastor could do nothing about it. If he ran he’d get caught and if he didn’t he’d be found holding a basket of human remains which could be traced back to a missing persons case.

“I’m afraid it’s just me and my ma, though we get by just fine, sir.”

His maman - what would she do when she found out? She'd be wrecked and her reputation would be ruined. No one would come to support her after hearing what he'd done. She'd have no income, no house, no friends.

"That's quite all right - though it doesn't sound like it'll remain so for much longer!"

How could he sound so happy about it? How dare he speak of her that way, whilst coddling his own son through thick and thin?

Alastor's word would never win out over that of the Whittman family's, but all be damned if he wouldn't try.

"Nor you and Vincent if I can help it."

Mr Whittman laughed with his chest - a noise too genuine for the topic. "Well, I can see why the two of you suit one another so well. So forward. But there's no need to rush, you're more than welcome to take him off my hands!"

He patted Alastor on the back. *What?*

"Al, I got the champagne, let's go!" Vincent was back but there were no sirens.

Mr Whittman wouldn't let him just leave- "You boys stay out of trouble now."

Vincent took him by the arm, and Alastor could only imagine the way his own eyes were straining in their sockets as he struggled to keep smiling. They waved goodbye to the old man, and rushed outside, both in a hurry for different reasons.

"I must ask," Alastor began, not entirely sure how to assess the danger of his situation. Vincent had betrayed him for a second time, no matter how accidental. The only saving grace was that Alastor recalled being led down the same path during the company party - even if he couldn't remember much else of the night - so he had a decent chance of gaining some distance if it came down to it. "What exactly does your father *know*?"

"Ah, haha. He kind of guessed about us - but I didn't tell him anything about the murder!" It was all speculation then. *Typical*, he took one look at Vincent's company and deduced him as a *criminal*. "He's been pretty protective ever since it's just been me and him. He's got me out of a load of problems, but he'd rather not keep doing that."

"Perhaps you shouldn't have killed Rattleson then."

"Uh huh, yeah." Alastor wasn't convinced. "It's alright though, he'll never know." It sounded like he *already* knew. For a man who's taken such lackluster precautions, Vincent was terribly overconfident. "Besides, he's more worried about you than me. He loves your work!"

Alastor stilled. "He hadn't mentioned he was a fan." He'd known Mr Whittman was funding the station, but he'd assumed the whole thing was just a coverup for his more *daring* business ventures. The fact that he was a willing audience member and corporate senior who was well-

aware of Alastor's appearance was- different. That would explain why the sirens hadn't come yet. He could work with this.

"Yeah?" Vincent continued with a smile. "You'll have to come round again some time to meet him properly."

Alastor could see where Vincent got his naive opinions of the world. Unconcerned with danger or norms. It was frustrating at times when his friend didn't notice the ways people acted differently around each of them or the reasons why. But it was also strangely vindicating to see the perspective of someone so unusually fascinating in his ignorance.

Boring was the worst thing someone could be, and Vincent was far from boring.

As the cobbled paths and decorative ponds turned to mud and overgrown trees, the men fell back on blabbering on like schoolboys. Even though Alastor wanted to shame Vincent for how his father babied him, he found himself being dragged along in the fun of it.

When they reached the clearing that Vincent had chosen, Alastor took the top blanket from his basket and unfolded it across an even section of ground. It was quite the spot - surrounded by great live oaks and nestled beside a small pond.

He laid out the boxes of food, taking care to point his friend towards his recommendations, he didn't want his first experience of cannibalism to be a bad one, after all.

"Damn Al, this is delicious!" Vincent said, mouth full of rice and spiced liver. "Can't believe Miss Rosie hid that body *and* gave you free food after."

Alastor could've sworn that his neck snapped as he whipped his head up to stare at his friend. He was sure Vincent had known, or at least it'd been heavily implied by himself and Rosie.

"Vincent. This *is* that body."

"Huh-?"

She had told him to cook up something nice with it, had she not? And Vincent hadn't seemed opposed to the idea at the time. In fact, Alastor had gathered that he was quite eager to get a taste.

"... What did you *think* Rosie used the corpse for?"

Vincent blinked slowly, looking between Alastor and the half-eaten bowl of dirty rice and liver in his hands. "I uh- guess I didn't question it." He was just happy to be invited on another date. "Maybe she could've cremated it for you?"

"Vincent." Alastor fought the urge to pinch his nose. "You're not exactly a quick study, are you?"

“That’s not a crazy assumption! It’s far less crazy than *eating human meat*!”

“I prefer to call it being resourceful, which is *technically* not a crime in any state.”

“How is it-? Whatever! As long as I’m not eating his dick or something.”

“Would you be *opposed* to eating dick?”

“What!?”

Alastor laughed obnoxiously, certain that Vincent’s blush was due to the taboo nature of his joke, rather than the pulsing desire that was actually fuelling the man’s heart. “No need for that face, Vincent!” He wheezed with another cackle. “It’s not like I’m offering!”

“I wouldn’t mind if it were yours.” He muttered.

“What was that?”

“I don’t mind it if it’s your cooking! Cannibalism, I mean, not the other thing.”

“Yes well, I quite enjoy cooking.”

Alastor’s mother had taught him young how to cook, *‘No man of mine will leave his wife doing all the work.’* a lesson which she’d also passed to his father after they’d married, resulting in his favorite memories in that tiny kitchen. He’d learnt many a recipe from her, and made up many of his own to satiate his unusual diet - the latter of which he wouldn’t dare share with her.

Vincent shoved another handful of the rice in his mouth to cover up his hesitation. ”How’d you make it so... appetising?”

Alastor smiled wider. “I'll have to teach you some day," It'd do Vincent some good to have some life skills. "Start with a bit of butter in the pan, sauté the liver until it’s golden, then toss in the onions, celery, and bell peppers, then fold it into rice with a pinch of thyme and cayenne. Simple enough, really.”

Vincent nodded along, entranced by his lover’s every word, despite not hearing any of them. He talked through a few other dishes, and as he became more excited, sometimes small colloquialisms were able to slip through his perfected accent.

“Although, I actually roasted some of the fingers as they were!” Alastor added with a grin as he pulled another box out of the basket, opening it to reveal a wrapped plate of ten, still warm fingers.

“Oh- that’s… nice.”

“Why don’t you give one a try, dear?”

Had they been left to rot like the other corpses Vincent had made, they would’ve lost all color by now, becoming a murky, yellow-grey and stiffening up. Silas’ fingers, however, had been

frozen, washed, and *cooked*, just as Alastor had explained. Now, the edges were a toasted golden, and the skin curled up from the edges where they'd been severed from his hands and roasted brown.

"Yeah, thanks?"

Vincent plucked up a finger, holding it between a thumb and index finger to inspect. It didn't bend but it wasn't completely stiff either, and the steam that curled its way to his nose made it all the more enticing.

Closing his eyes, he bit into the end, pulling skin and blood with his teeth to strip it to the bone. He kept his eyes closed as he chewed, pretending the crunch was that of lettuce, and the dribbling liquid was tomato sauce while he bit into a juicy hamburger. His tongue tried to retract as he felt something like a vein drift against it.

It was fine- nice, even. A delicious *hamburger*.

Eventually, he gathered the nerve to swallow, "Wow, that was… great." And he gave Alastor a weak thumbs up to cover for the rising acid that threatened to escape his stomach.

With his eyes now open, he caught Alastor breathing out a laugh into where his head rested against his palm. "I think you ate some nail there, darling."

"Nail?"

"You were supposed to pick that part off."

"Oh. Uh-" Vincent was still dazed by Alastor's soft smile. Or perhaps it was the sickening pressure in his head. "I just thought I'd get more of that crunchy texture, you know?" *Lettuce. It was lettuce. Don't throw up in front of your date.*

"Indeed." Alastor popped a finger into his own mouth and chewed happily, maintaining eye contact all the while. "You could always pretend you're a shark if that helps to stomach it."

Then, Alastor picked the bare bones from his mouth, a stray drop of blood flicking onto his cheek. "Sharks don't uh, like the taste of humans." He corrected distractedly, staring at how the red stain complimented his lover's waistcoat.

"So you've mentioned, although you've also said they eat their young, no?"

"Uh, kinda? The first Sand Tiger pups usually eat their siblings but it's not really the same as…" The fleck of blood was too distracting, and Alastor hadn't noticed it. He was just staring at him with the gentle version of his permanent smile, listening patiently as if he hadn't heard this all before.

Vincent leaned forwards instinctively, going to wipe it away, but just before he could make his move Alastor shot up and turned around.

"Did you hear that?"

“Hear what?”

Wasting no time, Alastor reached a hand into the bottom of his basket, pulling out the final object. A single-action Colt revolver.

“You said you wished to hunt, no?”

“Oh- yes. Yeah!” He *had* said that. And damn if Alastor didn’t look good holding that thing. “You just- you have a little-” He gestured to his own cheek.

Alastor wiped off the blood with a smile, “It’s not quite a hunting rifle, but I can show you the basics.” Then he offered the same bloodied hand to Vincent, who took it easily.

Alastor paused.

“What are you doing?”

“Holding your hand?”

“I was passing you the gun.”

“Oh! Right, thanks!”

Vincent quickly let go and snatched the gun instead, thumbing the hammer back, then lowering it carefully in lieu of testing it out.

Alastor paid his fiddling no mind. “Follow me, now.”

Despite not knowing exactly what they were chasing, Vincent desperately fought to keep up with his partner. Alastor was fast and nimble, showing off the worth of those hidden muscles that he’d seen while disposing of Silas.

It felt a bit silly, that he was holding the gun, yet he was panting and scrambling enough to scare off any prey. When Alastor stopped, Vincent was able to feel every muscle in his back as his own body collided straight into it, but Alastor didn’t stumble.

Without looking back, he took Vincent’s gun hand and aimed it forwards.

He couldn’t see anything.

“There’s a rabbit.” Alastor’s voice was hoarse when he whispered, and it hit Vincent in all the right ways when he ordered him to “Kill it.”

He still couldn’t see, but he trusted where Alastor had pointed the gun for him, so he shot at the bushes and thickets without hesitation.

The rabbit burst from the undergrowth - merely a blur of white and brown.

Vincent, having only spotted it as it hurled towards his face, staggered back on his heels. His hands grabbed out for Alastor, but he lost balance and tipped sharply down into the marshy ground.

Alastor howled with laughter, scaring off any hope of catching the rabbit.

“I- you- shut up! It was trying to attack me.”

“I saw, dear, you must have been utterly terrified.”

“Fuck off.” He said without any heat, and he remained sat on the wet ground with his arms crossed and face scrunched.

Alastor couldn’t help but find it a little endearing. Although… “Vincent, where are your glasses?”

“Hm?” He looked up, slowly realising why the blur of the trees had hidden the rabbit so well. He turned around to face the thickets that they’d blindly raced through. “Shit.”

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Chapter End Notes

😋 human flesh picnic in the woods

If there’s any inaccuracies in the meal preparation this is because I am not a cannibal, and I’m also a pescatarian. (I have dissected dead bodies but that’s another story)

Speaking of cannibalism, it’s not *technically explicitly* illegal in most USA states (Idaho is the exception - that law was made in 1990 after “Satanic Panic” and rumours surrounding “Baby X”’s ritualistic-appearing death) but it’s obviously very wrong to do and also illegal to obtain human meat so don’t 🤦

(It’s also not mentioned in the laws of the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Japan, India, and probably others)

Chapter 5: 5

Chapter Summary

Alastor leaves work early to care for his mother, and Vincent seizes the opportunity to meet his partner's parent.

Chapter Notes

CW: briefly described violence against animals

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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The walk back that day had been quiet. Though, it wasn't awkward by any means. It was as though they'd both been enjoying the moment too much to risk disrupting it.

Each time Alastor glanced beside him at his friend, he was overcome with fond amusement. Vincent's usually gelled hair was replaced by a layer of slowly drying mud and his gaze lingered, slightly unfocused. Between thin fingers, he clung to the empty bottle of champagne, pale hands reddened by the chill.

Noting his shivering, Alastor shrugged off his coat to drape over Vincent's thinner suit jacket, uncaring for how damp it would become. It was worth it to see his friend's mismatched eyes flicker wider in the moon's reflected light as he clutched the coat closer to his heart.

In his head, Alastor knew it hadn't been a successful night by any measure. Vincent hadn't enjoyed eating their victim - even if watching him pretend had been ever so entertaining - and he wasn't able to teach him a thing about hunting *or* cooking. But despite all that, Alastor didn't regret the wasted time like he usually did when things didn't go his way. There wasn't anyone else he'd have rather wasted a day with.

The older Mr Whittman shot them a strange look when they returned, covered in dirt and shaking from cold, but otherwise refrained from comment. He likely didn't wish to hear what the two young men had been up to so late in the gardens.

Rolling in mud. *Together*. Which resulted in shared clothes…

He was even less impressed when Vincent sheepishly admitted to needing new glasses - apparently this was a recurring issue, one he'd already been scorned for more than enough.

Not keen to witness the lecture, Alastor cut in with a decisive *'Right,'* and shuffled towards the doors.

Before he could begin his farewells, Mr Whittman interrupted him, "It's much too late for a young gentleman like yourself to be wandering alone."

To which Alastor tried to politely decline.

He didn't manage to get the words out because Vincent interjected with a, "Yes!"

"Vincent..." Alastor murmured, trying not to seem rude in front of his father.

Neither Whittman took notice of his reluctance.

"Do try to keep it down then, son. I'm sure you're both tired enough after that excitement outside."

Alastor assumed the *'excitement'* referred to the gunshot, which was surprising because he'd assumed the distance would've reduced it to a dull thump. Regardless, it did reaffirm his preference towards melee weapons. That, and the fact that a slowly traversed knife to the throat was much more *personal* than a bullet.

Why Vincent was blushing at his father's remark, Alastor wasn't sure.

He wasn't keen on intruding further, but the idea of trekking back towards his home in the middle of the night wearing damp clothes and liable to be mistaken for some derelict criminal was hardly appealing. So he didn't bother arguing as Vincent led him upstairs and towards the bedrooms.

Or, to his surprise, toward *Vincent's own bedroom.*

"Don't you have guest rooms?" Alastor asked, dawdling outside the door.

Had he been in any normal house, it would've sounded pretentious, but given the size of the estate and the number of doors they'd passed just on their way up there, he figured it was more than reasonable.

Vincent blinked.

"Uh, yeah? We have a shit ton of rooms." But he continued to hold open the door to his own bedroom, as though expecting Alastor to walk in.

After a few more seconds of impasse, Alastor clarified. “Would it not be more appropriate for me to take one of those, then?”

“Appropriate?” Vincent echoed, seemingly lost, but corrected his posture as he nodded on. “Sure. Yeah, of course. We can be appropriate. I was only thinking we’d go to sleep anyway, nothing more.”

Alastor frowned.

No amount of studying behaviours could’ve prepared him for this idiot man. With most others, he could tell a lie from a slipup or a joke from an insult - even through windows at a distance or from tone of voice alone when he stalked them through the city’s streets at night. But with Vincent, every situation was made into an invisible maze; every conversation hovering at the edge of something vaguely taboo.

What did he imagine they’d do otherwise? Sit awake and chatter? Why *wouldn’t* they be sleeping?

If he hadn’t known Vincent was such a spectacularly oblivious fool, Alastor may have interpreted his forwardness as the second definition of *queer*.

He huffed a laugh at the thought.

Vincent was a man of high society. It was unlikely he knew what a queer man *was*. Nevermind being accepting of them, and certainly wouldn’t *be* one.

It was best if he dropped that train of thought before he became too curious.

“I think you’d best take a shower first, no?”

Vincent looked down at himself in sudden realisation. *That would explain why Alastor was so reluctant to go into his room* - he must’ve seen Vincent for quite the sorry-looking bum.

He had half a mind to invite Alastor to join him in the shower, but figured from his exasperated expression that he was already preparing more ways to reject his advances.

So, he nodded his head and took off down the hallway, excitement building in his chest.

It would be nice to see Alastor unguarded for once: his hair messy and his face relaxed. In quieter moments, when he thought no one was watching, Vincent sometimes caught Alastor’s smile softening - a few times even dropping - and longed to treasure that expression all for himself. To photograph it and lock it up so only he could see it.

Alastor, however, had used his brief freedom from Vincent’s watchful gaze to locate a guest room.

He wandered the hallways opening doors at random. He’d never known there could be so many purposes for rooms: studies, music rooms, sunrooms, billiard rooms. Was it truly so

difficult to perform simple tasks without dedicating entire chambers to them?

Eventually, he came across a row of suites, all fitted with beds and heirloom furniture, and he chose one at random.

It was dusty from abandonment and lacked the sentimental ornaments of a loved home, but it somehow dwarfed many of the *houses* on his own street, and the mattress was beyond soft. Above all, it spared him from sleeping in the same room as his absurd friend, whose questionable grasp of propriety was becoming increasingly exhausting.

He hung his damp outerwear over a chair and nudged it in front of the radiator - a steam heater not unlike the one he'd been quietly saving to purchase for his mother.

After securing the door and windows, it didn't take long for sleep to claim him.

Come morning, Vincent finally found Alastor seated in the main lounge just below the stairway, fully dressed in his impossibly unwrinkled shirt and sat up straight. So much for seeing him unguarded.

The first thing he asked was why Alastor hadn't stayed. Then he realised how desperate that sounded, and without waiting for a response, Vincent hurried on. He apologised for *'taking things too fast'* and said that he hoped Alastor wasn't *'mad at him'*.

It was all deeply bothersome.

On the bright side, Alastor was driven to work that morning, even if Vincent's lost glasses rendered the journey more of a threat to their lives than necessary.

And after all that, Vincent never did return Alastor's coat.

It was after an interview the following week when Alastor next had an outing with his friend.

They'd finally covered that dreadful '*action'* film and spoken at length with its starring actor, Anthony Polvere. Throughout the conversation, Alastor had become decreasingly convinced of the innocent nature of the man's so-called acting experiences.

"Thank you again for joining us today, Mr Polvere." Vincent said, shaking his hand.

The detail in which Anthony described filming his kiss scenes was… inappropriate, to say the least, and Alastor was quite glad that their viewing of such escapades had ended so abruptly.

"No worries, Mista Whittman, and Toni's just fine. Though, you're welcome ta call me *Angel* if you'd like ta meet *outside* a' work."

“Will that be all, *Anthony*?” Alastor interrupted.

Not only because of the suggestively raised eyebrows that punctuated the offer, but because he’d seen this man with his tongue near neck-deep in a woman, and couldn’t burn the uncomfortable image from his eyes for all he tried. And with Vincent’s chronic obliviousness to boundaries, paired with the flirtatious exchanges that Anthony had been orchestrating for the last hour, he wasn’t exactly willing to leave them together.

“Yeah, just- if yous ever wantin’ another interview, I’d be happy to come on down. Gimme a call, yeah? You can skip past my manager, I much prefer this kinda work to the other stuff he sets me up with.”

Alastor didn’t plan on contacting him again. If it were him in charge of the station, they wouldn’t have been reviewing his film to begin with.

“Thank you Toni, that’s quite generous.” Thankfully, Vincent had remained professional throughout, even if he frustratingly refused to outright reject the man. “Does that mean he’s setting you up with another picture soon?”

“Not quite,” Anthony smirked. “Butcha know, I can always do other things for ya money?”

“Really now?”

That was quite enough of that.

“Husker!” Alastor spotted the station’s security guard walking past and called him over with all the false bravado he could muster. “Just the man we were looking for.”

“We were?” Vincent murmured.

“We were hoping you could show Mr Polvere here to the exit - we don’t want our guest to get lost now do we?”

Anthony chimed in, wisely dialing down his attitude to something closer to respectful. “I’m pretty sure it’s down the stairs and straight on to the lobby, Sir.”

“That’s quite alright, Husker’s happy to be of assistance.”

Husk wasn’t *happy* to do anything that Alastor requested, but he would never dare voice that. For the two of them had an *exchange* of sorts. When he’d first found him, Husk had been teetering on the edge of financial collapse in a run-down riverfront casino, where Alastor happened to be working the inclination to murder its repulsive proprietor. Through a series of helpful coincidences, Husk became a reluctant accomplice to said murder - though he was also granted relief from his debts through a steady position at the station, courtesy of the same man who held him firmly blackmailed.

“Well, if you say so. Don’t forget to give me a call, Mista Whittman!” If Toni was fazed by the tension behind Husk and Alastor’s stares, he used the moment to demonstrate his subpar acting skills to avoid addressing it. “Thanks fa walkin me out, Husker.”

Husk nodded and started towards the exit with Anthony in tow. “That ain’t my name, Al’s just an asshole.”

“Huh. Well what’s ya real name then, Whiskers?” The actor leaned in, regaining that flirtatious tone as he tugged playfully at Husk’s sideburns.

At least Vincent wasn’t the only man subject to his attention. Alastor wouldn’t stand for his co-host to get in trouble over something as pointless as crimes against nature. He’d seen enough fine men go out that way.

Alastor kept his eyes on them until they descended the stairs out of sight.

“*Alastor?*” Vincent drew out the syllables of his name like it was the opening of a show tune.

“What is it, Vincent?”

“Were you *jealous*?”

“Jealous?” Alastor mused. “What ever for?”

His friend laughed, patting him on the back with unwelcome enthusiasm. “Oh, I don’t know. Me and Mr Movie Star really seemed to hit it off, don’t you think?”

“You did both seem to conduct yourselves a little too eagerly, perhaps,” He replied coolly. “Though I fail to see why I would-”

“-Alastor, there’s a call for you.”

They were interrupted by one of the station’s telephone operators.

“I’ll be right there, Vagatha dear.” He could continue his questioning of Vincent later.

He didn’t see how his friend smiled fondly and shook his head as he walked away.

“It’s my ma. I must return home.” Alastor confessed as he snatched his coat from his chair.

Vincent followed a step behind, watching his partner collect his belongings. “Is everything alright?”

“I’m afraid that she’s come down with something, could you inform Mr Mammon that he needn’t wait for my return?”

She hadn’t exactly used such words over the telephone. In fact, she hadn’t *actually* mentioned any symptoms of illness. Quite the contrary - she had explicitly told him *not* to leave work early.

All she'd asked was for him to buy ingredients from the local grocer on his way home, saying she was peckish for his homemade stew.

"Al, it'll be packed with the lunch rush."

"I'll walk."

When Alastor first began earning a reliable income, his biggest grievance had been the hours spent away from home. Naturally, the moment they could spare the expense, he'd invested in a proper rotary dial. His ma had protested - scolded him for wasting his money on her, and said that they didn't need it - but it brought him comfort to know she was in reach.

She barely used the thing, but Alastor ensured that she knew *how* to in case of an emergency.

Which is why he was so worried to get her seemingly harmless call.

"Absolutely not," Vincent said, grabbing his own coat and rising to meet Alastor. "It's miles, I'll drive you."

"That's hardly necessary."

They'd almost finished for the day, having only a monthly review scheduled with Mr Mammon. Usually, these consisted of a few backhanded compliments and a slap on their backs, which somehow took up the better half of their afternoons. This meant that neither man was worried about missing out, and Alastor suspected that it made Vincent even more eager to get away.

"Don't worry, Al," He grinned. That mischievous look that he did when he thought Alastor knew what he was talking about. "I know it's early days but parents always love me!"

"That isn't- I-" Still, he managed to baffle. Did any other adult men make a habit of befriending one another's parents? Alastor was fairly confident that such behaviors were preserved for children on playdates or long-established courtships. Either way, he hadn't the time to unpack it. It was the second strange thing that Vincent had said that day, and he reasoned that he must be off kilter from the thrill of interacting with a moviestar. "Very well. Please don't dawdle."

"Of course! Just a second-"

He slipped away to one of the office drawers, and shifted his body so that Alastor couldn't peer over his shoulder.

Beneath his poorly annotated scripts and chewed pens, was a small velvet box of expensive cufflinks, newly purchased from a small Canal Street haberdashery. He'd bought two matching sets, both with silver posts and bicolor faces to compliment their accompanying suits. He'd been hoping to give one pair to Alastor on a special occasion, but meeting his mother came sooner than he expected and he was forced to reprioritise. He'd have to prepare another gift for Alastor in the future. Perhaps a watch - his current one was getting dated.

Alastor just raised a brow when Vincent turned, adjusting his new cuffs.

If the man was planning on flaunting his wealth to gain his mother's respect, he had a slimmer chance than expected.

It wasn't until Alastor settled into the passenger seat of Vincent's Packard that he was reminded of another problem.

"Marigny, right? Where did you want to stop for ingredients?"

Alastor didn't reply and his friend's hand hovered over the gear stick with the car still parked. "Al?"

Why was it so much easier to keep victims complacent and police unaware than to lie to this singular idiot?

"Actually it's in Ninth."

"Oh?" Vincent frowned, attention catching. "I thought you lived with your mom?"

Ah yes, of course he'd had to run his mouth about his ma. He recalled telling Vincent about the time they'd spend lounging around the radio and cooking for their neighbours. It was only natural that he'd mention her when she was one of the most important people in his life - even more so with how quickly Vincent had approached that list.

"Yes, well. Marigny was simply a convenient in-between."

They both knew it wasn't. Especially Alastor, since he'd made his way to and from the streets in the peak of oppressive Southern heat. From the disbelieving look on Vincent's face, it was clear that he, too, understood how bizarre that excuse was.

Rather than addressing the strange lie, Vincent reached to release the handbrake and mumbled, half to himself, "I was wondering why you never mentioned the flowers I've been sending."

"The what?"

"Nothing, nothing." He laughed. "I'm only joking."

And he pulled the car into reverse with a strained smile, keen for a change of topic.

"... they can also replace their own teeth thousands of times throughout their lives, which is pretty amazing since they have so many."

Alastor led his friend through his neighbourhood, a fresh bag of groceries in hand. He figured they'd catch less eyes if they ditched the overly expensive motorcar early on, and walked the rest. However, he hadn't accounted for how much of a racket Vincent could make once he started talking.

"Naturally, I wanted to ask if it's because they have no bones, but the guide told me she was too busy touring school children - but, I mean, it's not like they were as interested as I was, so I don't see why she couldn't spare me a few more minutes."

There were a decent few families roaming the streets, and Alastor took count of how many did double takes as they saw the source of the loud blabbering. Somehow, he couldn't find it in him to be ashamed of his company, and nodded along in amorous intervals.

"So anyway she moves on to teaching these kids about sea lions instead - which is fine. Until one of these scamps says that they were cooler than sharks, and I just had to tell him that sharks eat sea lions," Alastor huffed and played off his smile by directing it towards a familiar passerby. "It's not my fault he started crying. They're only lumps of fat anyway."

Alastor made a mental note to never let this man near another child.

"And the guide - who at this point has given me two warnings already - tells this little boy that sea lions and sharks live very far apart so there's nothing to worry about."

Alastor almost rolls his eyes. The guide couldn't have known that there was no sugarcoating shark facts allowed in the presence of Mr Vincent Whittman.

"But that's a lie, and this school trip is meant to be for learning, so I tell them the truth - that sharks can detect even the tiniest drop of blood from hundreds of yards away."

"I'm sure that went down splendidly."

"Not quite!" He ignored the obvious sarcasm in favor of finishing his story. "Turns out, crying is like a disease for these brats, because next thing you know they're all screaming their heads off, if you can believe it!"

He *could* believe it. Not only that, but he could picture it quite distinctly in his head: a befuddled Vincent being assailed by a horde of spiteful toddlers.

"Now, apparently I'm not to go back there, but I don't see how that's fair when I'm not the one who started it-"

"Could you hold this for a moment, dear?" Alastor handed the grocery bag over to Vincent and took out his keys.

Brought out of his own head, Vincent took in the sight before him. Alastor's house was a slim thing that was nestled between two taller buildings, rose a polite distance away from the street itself. The porch was decorated in warm lamplight, and seemed to act as a welcoming guise before the shade-shrouded home. It was funny how the faded red of its linseed-stained clapboards and dated curtains made it look like the wooden imitation of its owner.

The thought made him wonder who'd mimicked who's style, before deciding that it was because they were raised together. Vincent made himself laugh with the imagery, which made Alastor scowl, and he shrunk down a little with a guilty grin.

Alastor spared Vincent a final assessing glance before turning the keys and swinging his way in.

"Ma?" He called out.

"Welcome home, deary. I'm just through here."

Alastor was mindful enough to leave his shoes to the side before striding across the worn rug of the lounge.

His maman sat by the radio, its polished casing glowing beneath the lamplight, beckoning him closer as it always did. Snippets of fabrics spilled over the small side table under spools of thread and pins. Alastor wove between the scattered cloths with the same graceful precision that he used for every activity - from tying his shoelaces to stalking his prey.

Vincent watched on from the doorway as Alastor placed a hand to his mother's head.

"Ma, you're burning up."

"Oh, hush now, don't you start fussin'," She swatted lightly at his wrist, though the gesture lacked conviction. "You didn't leave work early for me, did you?"

"We finished early anyway," Alastor answered with a half-truth. "I'll make you something fresh, but you ought to be in bed."

She just smiled and picked up a stray piece of fabric. "I must finish this dress for Ms Phim's sister by Thursday. She's interviewing to teach at the local Kindergarten down by the church." Her needle resumed its steady motion. "Isn't that wonderful?"

"Yes ma, but I'm sure you can spare one evening."

"Emily's quite the looker, you know?" She continued as if he hadn't spoken, eyes fixed on her work. "Terribly smart, and around your age."

Vincent shuffled his feet near the doorway. Listening to his lover's mother describe a more suitable partner for him - especially one who was more capable at dealing with children - wasn't exactly ideal.

"I'm sure she is, but-" Alastor started.

Taking a short breath, Vincent braced himself for a show, and stepped away from the front door.

At the sound of footsteps on creaking wood, Mrs Hartfelt put down her needle and rose from her armchair, smoothing her skirt with gentle pats. “Now, who’s this dashing young man you’ve brought with you, Alastor?”

“Hello Mrs Hartfelt,” He took her hand with a practiced smile. “I’m Vincent Whittman, Alastor’s co-host and partner.” He added a wink and a kiss to her knuckles.

“Oh *I see*.” Her brows lifted in amusement and it took every restraint for Alastor not to groan. “I take it you’re the one he spent last weekend with?”

“Ma, please sit down.”

“Why don’t you cook us that stew while I get to know your friend?”

He was quickly regretting his company. Why hadn’t he told his friend to drop him off and drive home?

“Vincent, make sure she stays sat down and stops working.”

“Uh, yeah. Yes, sure thing!” He was far too enthusiastic for Alastor’s liking. “You have a beautiful home, Ms Hartfelt!”

“Why thank you, but please, call me Marie, dear.”

Vincent repeated the compliment, this time swapping out her name as though they were old pals.

“There’s no need for all that polite chatter.” She leant forwards on her couch, voice dropping conspiratorially. “Do tell me, were you the handsome chap that had my son all done up for the picture shows last month?”

Alastor released a weary sigh before disappearing into the kitchen.

“Yes, ma’am- Marie.”

Perhaps they should’ve ironed out the details before he claimed to be good with parents. He’d only ever dated one *man*, and never got around to meeting Valentino’s parents - he wasn’t much of a family man. As for the women he’d dated, there was usually a lot more preamble before getting to this point.

With Alastor’s mother, he couldn’t even be sure that she approved of her son’s deviance. He reasoned that she must have known somewhat, why else would Alastor allow him to tag along without so much as a warning?

“He cleaned up real nice.” He cringed at his own words. Of course he cleaned up nice, he *always* looked nice. Unlike Vincent in his permanently wrinkled shirts and windswept hair.

She laughed anyway, “He did, didn’t he?” And she leaned forwards. “So how long have you been seeing him, honey?”

“It’s been almost two months now - we broached the topic at the last investor’s party.”

“Well ain’t that somethin’.” She said, in a manner all too familiar from his conversations with her son. “Lord knows our Alastor gets too easily flustered to discuss these things.”

Flustered? Vincent had never seen Al flustered, and it was difficult to imagine. He *had*, however, seen Alastor hesitate and startle, and that was an achievement in and of itself.

So, he started with that: describing animatedly to Ms Hartfelt how Alastor had pulled him away from a moviestar just that day, with murder in his eyes; how when he’d invited Alastor to the pictures, Alastor had suggested they share a box of popcorn; how they’d taken a stroll through the woods (not mentioning the reason why), and shared a picnic in his gardens a few days later.

From the kitchen, Alastor could only make out muffled sounds of conversation over the sizzling of vegetables.

While he doubted that the pair could cause too much mischief in the brief time that he left them unsupervised, he wasn’t exactly reassured by the conspiratorial giggles that sometimes reached his ears.

He diced the vegetables with much less care than usual in his hurry to take control of the situation. It resulted in a meal that wasn’t up to his usual standards, but sacrifices had to be made to prevent the conversation from reaching his childhood.

He’d poked his head out once.

Then again.

But each time only received an exaggeratedly reassuring smile and thumbs-up from his ma and friend respectively.

The stew suffered for it.

It was a good thing that he rushed too, if Vincent’s beet red cheeks were any sign.

“Oh- we don’t- we haven’t done that yet, ma’am!”

He looked over at Alastor for help, who’d entered with a bowl of fresh, steaming stew, balanced atop a folded cloth. Taking pity, he cut in, “Ma, stop embarrassing him. He’s from a different world.”

“Oh I’m sure you *both* are!” Marie giggled, though he couldn’t follow her point.

Instead, he turned to Vincent, who was snugly perched on the neighboring couch. It was a strange feeling to have his two biggest worlds collide beneath the warm light of his little home, but it wasn't an unwelcome one, especially with how at peace the man seemed, with his disgustingly attractive smile and dusted cheeks. It made Alastor want to squish them.

… Violently, of course. How else?

Or to hold him over the stove and cook him up like he'd done to infiltrating rats as a child. His parents hadn't exactly approved of the behaviour, but they were going to be killed one way or another so he didn't see the issue (He didn't say as much out loud). Eventually, he learnt to channel his urges into dissecting roadkill, but that never satisfied him in the same way.

Vincent could probably understand that.

He turned to his friend, "Would you like me to bring you a bowl?"

"Oh! I'd love to," He said, but rose from his chair. "I have to get back, my father has guests over tonight." It was a valid excuse, but Alastor had a small suspicion that he didn't want to risk finding another finger in the stew.

"Very well, I'll show you out, Mr Whittman."

"Goodbye Vincent! Do ask Alastor to bring you over again, it was ever so nice to meet you, dear."

"Of course, Marie."

Alastor watched the exchange in awe, and once they were out of earshot, he questioned his friend. "Have you placed her under hypnosis? I've never seen her take to someone so quickly."

Vincent laughed and said, "Does that mean I'm the one?" Before he left with a loopy smile.

Back inside, he was confronted with a similarly intruding question.

"Why didn't you tell me you'd snagged such a wonderful boyfriend, Allie?"

He wanted to slam his head into the door, but just took out the instinct by twisting the keys harshly. Was *that* the impression she'd gotten? It would explain how smiley she'd been.

"Get some rest please, maman." He shooed her with a hand and moved to take the empty bowl from her side.

"You worry too much, dear." She said, somehow smiling even wider. "He's nothing to be ashamed of, you'll have to bring him around again."

The expression was contagious, but Alastor rolled his eyes to counter it.

“Besides, I’d only called you back so I could meet him.”

What.

“Oh, don’t give me that look, deary, you’ve been awfully happy recently.” He resented the notion. He was nothing but true to his character. But the more he thought about it… “I figured it was someone from work, and you can’t blame your mother for wanting to know where you spent a night.”

He didn’t grace her with an answer and strode away into the kitchen. They must both have known how ridiculous that would be. *Him and Vincent*.

It was silly how much pause that gave him.

Ridiculous.

Even if Vincent was a good man - as good as a murderer can come - he was very peculiar. And he didn’t want to feed his ma’s delusions.

All that said, Alastor still figured that he ought to bring him around again. He did make for good company…

Not to mention, he was right about parents loving him - even if that courtesy didn’t seem to extend to children. He could spin a simple tale into extravagance, and weave the perfect compliment to impress anyone. Alastor considered himself to have similar skills, and suspected it was something that they’d both self-taught over their years of people-watching.

Any man could fall victim to Vincent’s charm.

All except for Alastor, with whom he stumbled over words and ranted about whatever nonsense crossed his floundering mind.

Although, to him, those strange habits had their own way of worming into his heart.

Chapter End Notes

After four failed attempts at a kiss, Vincent really thought he’d get Alastor in bed.. regardless, it seems as though his friend *is* growing even more fond of him :)

Giving a child to Vox would either be the worst or best thing to ever happen to it, and I don’t believe there’s any option in between.

Chapter 6: + 1

Chapter Summary

Misunderstandings are resolved.

Mushy fluffy losers <3

Chapter Notes

CW: Homophobia, murder, cannibalism

See the end of the chapter for more notes

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Vincent sighed as he skimmed through the final pieces of listener mail, leaning back in his chair until it creaked in protest.

It was usually his favorite part of the day - the quiet stretch after hours of recording, when the station emptied out and the two of them could sit together, sorting through letters long after everyone else had gone home.

Some were sweet enough to make it to air.

Others less so.

They'd laugh their way through flirtatious praise and confessions of devotion, written in looping cursive and often with promises of leaving husbands or crossing state lines for a chance to meet with the mysterious voices on the radio.

It hadn't always been their job.

When they'd first started, the mail was filtered by the company, leaving them free to feign surprise when a listener wrote about how they'd learned to dance from their songs, or thanked them for the company on long nights. They'd bounce a joke between them, slipping easily into their showman personas, and thank the audience before the closing act.

However, the company was oftentimes lax on what they let slide through.

A comment on how they never showed their faces. An advertisement disguised as a helpful note. A question about union strikes or racial disputes or foreign entanglements as powers remilitarized across Europe.

Since the new President's tactics depended on radio for his fireside chats, listeners seemed to take every broadcast for an invitation to debate. While Vincent didn't mind a lively audience, many of them felt less like innocent questions and more like bait.

Their boss, of course, wasn't so concerned. If anything, Vincent suspected that he still had it out for them - just waiting for them to slip up one single response so he'd have the excuse he needed to pull them from the air for good.

After some back and forth, they'd come to a compromise. If they wanted to cut down on those listener mails so badly, they could handle them on their own time.

Which was why Vincent was sat alone in their temporary office, three uneven piles of envelopes scattered across the shared desk, sleeves rolled to his elbows, and a crooked smile lingering behind a cigar. The blinds were half-open, offering only the dull yellow glow of a nearby streetlamp, while the last dregs of sunlight were settling on the opposite side of the building.

Alastor had been called away by Mr Mammon nearly an hour prior. As Vincent slid another letter into the accepted stack, he wondered if his partner had simply decided to head home for the night without a word. It wouldn't be the first time.

As the stacks of letters dwindled, and his cigar reduced to a nub, Vincent stood with a stretch and a yawn. They could surely finish up together. He wouldn't stand for Alastor to avoid the work, no matter how much he loved the man.

He pushed his chair back and gathered his coat from the hook.

Behind him, the office door clicked shut, the sound echoing down the empty hallway. Most of the lights were already shut off, leaving only one room glowing faintly behind a closed door.

It was only natural that he took a peek.

He was careful not to make noise as he put his head to the small crack between door and doorframe.

There, Alastor sat, one hand braced against a stack of papers while the other moved quickly across a page with a pen. Several more piles surrounded him, arranged with the kind of careful order that was expected of the man.

Vincent smiled at the sight.

"Al?" He pushed open the door. "I thought you left already."

Alastor startled slightly at the sound, but had recovered his practiced grin by the time he turned to face his friend. "Ah, Vincent! No, no, I'll be leaving in just a moment, old pal."

He struck a firm line through the page in front of him before setting it aside.

From the corner of his eye, he watched as Vincent sauntered into the room, peering over his shoulder at the nearest pile of documents.

"Reports?" He asked.

Alastor hummed in confirmation, trying to focus on completing his annotations before the evening drifted into night.

Station logs, sponsor sheets and audience reviews weighed down the desk. Vincent picked up a random page and flipped it over between his hands with a frown. "Is this what you're interested in now?"

"Ha! Not at all." Alastor didn't even look up, licking a finger to turn over a page.

It was one of the more tedious departments in the station, and numbers weren't something he was all too bothered by. Most of the reports concerned programs that he'd never once taken the time to tune into.

"Unfortunately, the young Cain has taken a sick day - a death in the family, so I'm told." He didn't voice his suspicions. They were both privy to the workplace gossip and rumors. "Mr Mammon has requested that I take his place for the evening."

Vincent raised a brow, peering at the other chairs in the office.

"Don't three people work here, where're the others?"

Alastor paused, eyes flicking to the side before returning to the page.

The truth was, when the other two colleagues had seen him being ushered in by their boss, they'd taken the opportunity to voice their own excuses. Whether from intolerance or pure incompetence, Alastor was too tired to ask. He'd just smiled and clenched his hand tighter around his pen, holding back a deep sigh.

"I volunteered to take over," he lied lightly. They both knew he'd much rather be sitting in their shared office, laughing over their mail. "I'm much more efficient when left to my own devices."

He scribbled another note in the margin, flipped the page, and reached for the next-

Only to stop when a chair scraped loudly into position beside him.

"What ever are you doing, Mr Whittman?"

Vincent dropped into the seat and a hand reached out to pull a hefty stack of reports closer.

"I wouldn't be a very good partner if I let you get too rundown to record, now would I?"

Were it anyone else, Alastor would've insisted that they leave him to it, but with Vincent, he only huffed a small laugh, and shook his head.

He would never convince him to leave.

It was part of what he liked about the man.

The room grew stuffy with the door shut, and the air warm from the desk lamp. Vincent had his insistent habit of sitting far too close, their chairs nearly touching so that their arms brushed as they worked.

It made the work inconvenient. Yet…

Alastor ignored the faint, unwelcome warmth rising up the back of his neck. His mother's words had been lingering in his mind, no matter how adamantly he denied - to her and himself - anything improper about his relationship with Mr Whittman.

Truth be told, working with Vincent did little to speed the process along. If anything, it made the task more difficult. Each time he completed a page, Alastor felt the need to check over it, lest he take the blame for any mistakes.

While the bulk of the work was sound, he found no lack of spelling errors.

"I'd assume you'd lost your glasses again," Alastor muttered, scratching through a number of offensively misspelled city names. "But I can see them on your big head."

"Oh shut up, Al, it's late and the letters jumble. My glasses work fine."

"Perhaps I can swap you for a less defective partner."

Alastor tapped his pen to Vincent's forehead, watching in satisfaction as his eyes flickered up to follow the movement.

He was so easy. Even the smallest gesture could steer his attention in any which way he pleased.

"Come now, you wouldn't trade me for the world."

Vincent laughed and caught Alastor's wrist, trying to tug his hand out of the way.

Before he could manage it-

"-are you pansies actually getting anything done in here, or just kissing in the closet?"

A voice came from the doorway, low and sharp.

Adam leaned against the doorway, his sudden appearance seeming to suck the artificial warmth from the room.

His face was paler than usual, only dark where his skin tightened around sunken eyes. Alastor wondered whether it was due to genuine grief, or from the stress of consequences. While he held himself with his usual broad confidence, there was a crushing weight that dragged on his shoulders, giving him a foreign guise of humility beneath his usual arrogance. Like a twig ready to snap.

Interesting.

Alastor lowered his pen slowly from Vincent's forehead, careful to show that they had nothing to hide - despite Vincent's hand still circling his wrist.

"Good evening Adam." He said, though it was now the night. "What do you suppose you mean by that?"

He spoke placidly, ignoring how his blood urged him to plunge the metal tip of his pen through one of those beady eyes. Or better: to lodge it down the throat of that blabbering mouth and watch it breach through the side of his neck to see his blood decorate the room.

He'd been wanting to send Adam to retirement for some time now, but there was too much of a connection to justify the risk. Now, with the uniquely hopeless state of the man, and the coming investigation into his family, he may have the perfect opportunity.

"Aw," Adam cooed through curled lips, keeping up his crummy facade. "You two actually getting any work done in here, or just holding hands like a pair of fairies? I could just string toy both up for display."

Vincent tore his hand off of Alastor's wrist in a movement so fast that he almost rocked back in his chair.

Alastor almost missed the contact.

So, he imagined the satisfying squelch that Adam's corpse would make split open on his cabin table. How he'd scoop the organs out of that lardy carcass, one by one. They wouldn't be worth eating. He could already sense the buttery grease that would cling to his saggy organs in thick, suffocating layers. Even strung up to a tree, he wouldn't even make a good display - not when he already had the appearance of a decaying corpse.

But his screams?

His useless, hateful screams being silenced by a final crunch of his neck? Those would ensure his death was not wasteful.

He smiled sweetly.

"I suppose you're still bitter that our dear Vaggatha didn't wish to entangle with you."

"Fuck off." Adam pushed himself off the doorframe to stomp further into the room, grumbling out profanities. "I'm here for my son's shit."

He began shuffling through a cabinet on the far side of the room, opening drawers seemingly at random.

Alastor turned to Vincent, satisfied that he'd put the man in his place. But his friend didn't look pleased.

His jaw was tight and face fixed in a frown. Fingers resting on papers without moving.

That wouldn't do.

They'd spoken before about their mutual hatred of the man, so Alastor hoped that a few more pointed jabs could bring out that lovely wonky smile. And he had just the ammunition.

"Hm?" He tapped against the table, subtly demanding attention. "And which divorce did that son come from?"

"The fuck did you say?" Adam turned, the drawers left open and forgotten behind him. "You think you're clever, do you, brat? I lost a kid today."

Alastor ignored the warning in his tone, pushing on with the rumors he'd heard. "I do wonder, are you upset that he's gone… or upset that neither son was as holy as you liked to pretend?"

"You heartless prick." Adam took a step towards him. "I raised two good men."

Alastor glanced at Vincent again.

Still no movement.

So he pressed. "You raised them, did you? That's not what I heard."

He'd never met Adam's youngest son, though he'd heard enough from his insolent colleague, Cain, to get a picture of their family. Cain was a simple creature - a common psychopath with no flair for stylistic crimes. He formed relations through mutual hatred for others, and ran his mouth to anyone who'd pay him mind, a clear result of an overlooked childhood.

Willing to kill to quench his need for attention, and never learning to live without it.

Now that he thought about it, Alastor's own companion wasn't much different. But where Cain was openly unruly and conceited, Vincent could at least be trained to hide it.

It hadn't taken much prodding for Alastor to gather his own blackmail on the other Dicksons.

"I must ask," he tilted his head thoughtfully. "Do you think Cain was more jealous of your love for Abel, or Peter's?"

"What."

"I did hear he was quite infatuated with that other boy." Adam's hand shook and he knew he'd hit the mark. "Some said they were attached at the hip even!"

"My son's no pansy!" He slammed a fist against the desk, shaking the papers from their neatly arranged piles.

Alastor silently raised a brow.

Adam spluttered like he'd been hurt.

"*Was*." His voice cracked with the correction. "My son was no pansy. So watch your goddamn mouth."

"That's enough, Mr Dickson."

Vincent interrupted, his face still annoyingly neutral but his voice firm.

"No need to be jealous, Whittman. Mind your own fucking business."

When Vincent looked up, his eyes were sharp, the distance gone.

"Why? You got something to hide, Dickson?"

Adam scowled for a moment longer, then turned with a curse. He went back to the cabinet, shoving papers aside with more aggression than necessary until he'd found his son's belongings - a worn notebook, half-empty pack of cigarettes, and a bronze paperweight in the shape of a sheep.

He slammed the door on his way out. "Fuck you, freaks."

Without missing a beat, Alastor turned to his partner, grin wide and ready to commend him for adding such a brilliant final act to their performance.

Vincent beat him to it.

"Nice one, Al!" He crossed his hands behind his head. "How long do you think before Cain kills his father too?"

"I'd give it two months after the funeral. Though we may have hastened the timeline if this conversation makes it back home."

"Yeah…"

Vincent shrank back into his chair, his smile slowly drained into that distance look again.

"… Reckon he's onto it?"

Alastor took the sheet from in front of his friend, content to continue his work and their conversation lulled. "Onto what?"

"Our secret." Vincent glanced at the closed door, then muttered, "The fairy thing."

Alastor paused, pen hovering.

"The… fairy thing?"

"Pansies." Vincent muttered the word with a click of his tongue, like it was worse than the chunks of human nail he'd bitten into before. "Like his son."

Alastor placed his pen on the table carefully, watching his friend with intense curiosity. "You're…"

From his scowl, Vincent looked just about ready to tear the documents into shreds. To yank Adam back into the room and bash in his head apart with a heavy book.

It was... strangely endearing.

"Oh, Vincent," Alastor couldn't say it was a complete surprise - he believed himself to be rather practiced at reading people, and sometimes that including finding friends of Dorothy's in his frequent speakies - though it was most unusual for someone of such high status to accept such sideways feelings. "You're a queer?"

Vincent went still.

"… What?"

Ah.

Or perhaps he hadn't entirely accepted it, which was perfectly understandable.

After all, it was unlikely that he had anyone to support him in his circles, and was probably expecting Alastor to lash out after realizing his deviance. Alastor had heard many a tale.

Alastor waved a hand lightly, hoping to indicate just how trivial the matter was. "It's quite alright, Vincent, I'm acquainted with a number of fine ladies and men in similar circumstances. I can introduce you if you'd like."

"You- you can-? What?"

"Yes, yes, there's nothing to worry about."

He laughed at Vincent's scrunched face.

"And between you and me," he leaned in to whisper. "I'm sometimes rather partial towards men myself."

"Sometimes?"

"In the few instances I've felt inclined." He'd never actually pursued a relationship, but he could admit to considering it when a handsome lady or pretty man crossed his path.

Vincent didn't respond, just stayed staring in apparent shock.

Maybe Alastor was being too forward. He wasn't sure why the topic had made him act so carelessly feisty, but he figured he should reign it in.

He cleared his throat. "If you're still uncertain, it may be best if you forget what I said."

"Forget?" Vincent frowned at the thought.

It seemed he didn't want to forget, which was reassuring. All in all, he'd been reacting rather sensibly, and Alastor believed it was going rather well.

"What?"

Vincent repeated again - he had such a way with words when he was on air that it was undeniably laughable how quickly it all fell away under pressure.

"Alastor, we've been dating for two months!"

Like a record scratching, Alastor's mind came to a halt. Every thought of reassurance and affirmation shattered and he was left with that same single word.

"*What*."

"What do you mean '*what*'?" Vincent was livid. "What the hell are we talking about here?"

"Vincent, you've couldn't possibly have known I shared your tastes-"

"-You fucking- you took me to meet your mother yesterday!" His words were halfway between a whine and a scream. "That was like- a big step for me! I wore special fucking cufflinks."

"She was ill? It was a spur of the moment decision that you just so happened to attend." Alastor was speaking quickly on instinct, failing to give his thoughts a chance to keep up.

"She didn't seem ill to me." He challenged, then calmer he said, "But you said you wanted to be my partner, remember? After the investor's party?"

"The investor's- Vincent, I was utterly intoxicated!" Alastor could practically see the cogs turning through his friend's wide eyes in sync with the headache that was tightening around his skull. "Partners? I didn't say I wanted to- oh."

"Well, you said hypothetically but I thought we were being subtle because no one would ever allow a mixed race homosexual couple to publicly announce themselves."

"I hadn't thought…"

He hadn't thought Vincent meant romantic partners.

Two months? They had been speaking more freely recently but… and Vincent was a good man…

"The fuck?" Vincent knew it had been too good to be true. It was just typical that his most successful relationship to date hadn't been a romantic relationship at all. He stood up and began to pace the room. "Jesus Christ, that makes so much more sense, of course you wouldn't be dating me."

"Vincent."

"No, I mean- fuck, I thought we were taking it slow so I didn't want to push you and you kept brushing off my advances but I thought when you kept going out with me that-"

"-Vin."

"-God, I'm such a creep. I've been following you around with my lips pursed like a fucking goldfish and you don't even like me back and I-"

Scenarios kept springing to his mind: all the times he'd brushed a hand against Alastor's and thought he was pretending not to notice; the times he'd tried to lean in for a kiss and been dodged; the time he tried to get Alastor into his bedroom! It was mortifying. Not to mention when-

"-We killed that asshole! We killed him and I thought that was romantic because he ruined our night at the pictures but you must've been so confused when I started helping you," between his laughter and his spewing words, he wasn't sure whether he was breathing. "Fuck."

"Listen-"

"No, it's alright, Al. I won't tell anyone."

He cared for him far too much for that.

"You already know I've killed so many other people, funny right? My dad can pay my way into any job and I still had to kill people to keep them."

He'd never seen Alastor look so lost for words. Somewhere in his head, he processed that as a kind of hollow achievement.

"And then I look at you! And you came all this way on your own and with everyone waiting for your downfall. And you're just perfect… and you probably only kill bastards because you're fucking amazing and-"

Alastor kissed him.

A small peck to his lips and he was back in his seat in the blink of an eye.

He'd kissed him.

"… Gee whiz." Vincent breathed out dumbly.

“Quel benêt craquant tu es."

Vincent stared at him in a daze.

French? He was sure he knew some French from somewhere.

"… Oui?"

Alastor smiled.

He made Alastor smile.

"Why don't I take you on a proper date, cher?"

"Wha-" Yes, a thousand times yes. But all he could bring his tingling lips to say was, "Proper?"

Alastor stood and he stood too. As though pulled by a string.

"Tomorrow night at Ozzie's," Alastor said, guiding him towards the door. "Sunday's finest."

"Okay…"

He watched wordlessly as Alastor locked the office door behind them.

Then, Alastor leaned in closer, and Vincent's body ached to feel the touch of his lips once more.

All he felt was Alastor's breath mixing with his in the small gap of air between them.

In it, he drawled out a threat. "If you ever betray me, I will skin your screaming body limb from limb and make you watch as I feed your flesh to the wildlife."

And with that, Alastor strode away, leaving Vincent staring after him with tented pants and a new memory that was certainly going to occupy his nights.

Once Alastor was out of sight, he folded into a crouch and dug his elbows into his knees.

He sat there for a minute. Maybe two. Probably more.

Staring in silence until the hum of lights shut off, signaling that the final employee had gone home for the night.

Alastor hadn't known they were dating.

They hadn't been dating

But, Alastor wanted to date him.

Even though he was an idiot, he took Alastor on disastrous outings and the law and the country and the world would kill them for loving one another.

Alastor didn't mind.

Vincent let out a shaky laugh into his hands.

"Uh, Whittman?" Vincent peeked up from behind his fingers.

He was met with the burly frame of the station's head of security, flashlight in hand, burning accusingly into Vincent's rubbed and reddened eyes.

"I've gotta lock up." Husk said flatly. "Scam."

"Shit!" Vincent scrambled to his feet. "Sorry Husk. I'm on my way!"

For all Husk was trained to deal with crazies, drunks, and lunatics, the manic look in Vincent's wide, bright eyes was more than a little unsettling. As he stumbled to his feet, Husk couldn't help but take a step back and check the position of his holster.

"…Right." He grumbled. "How about I show you to the doors?"

"That's alright, chap!" Vincent stepped towards him, looking down at him to make uncomfortably eager eye contact. "I've got a date. Can you believe it?!"

"That's… swell."

It wasn't hard for Husk to believe.

Whittman was, by most standards, a quite attractive man. Aside from his too bright, mismatched eyes and unrefined personality, he had all the traits and genetics of a societally well-loved man. Tall, fair, kind-faced. A man who was far too easily trusted for what he was worth.

Husk, on the other hand, with his dark skin and short stature, was still finding it difficult to believe that he had an upcoming date with a movie star, despite already having spent a night together. Angel, it seemed, was a very experienced lover. With terrible taste.

Only because of that, he was willing to empathize with the excitement.

Didn't mean it demanded a full hysterical episode in the middle of his workplace almost two hours after his shift should've ended.

"You sure you don't need help gettin' home, Whittman?"

Vincent was already halfway down the hallway by the end of Husk's question.

"I have a date!"

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Ozzie's, as it turned out, was a narrow, run-down building just off of Baronne Street, tucked between a grocer and a boarded-up bank. Vincent had checked the address so many times that his cabbie drove off without waiting for a tip.

The front to the bar was a record store, and Vincent wondered if Alastor had found the speakie by accident when searching for new additions to their shows.

He could imagine his partner all dressed up for an evening walk, wandering across the place, open in the wee hours of the night. He probably couldn't resist from poking his head inside - likely humming a little tune as he watched a drunk man stumble past him toward the door. He would've noted it as strange, then returned to browsing the racks for the works of Calloway or Fitzgerald. Perhaps he spotted an open backroom or noticed a loose panel, and heard the calling of music beckoning him downstairs.

However he'd found it, it wasn't a place that Vincent would ever think to look, with its peeling paint and clouded windows. A crooked sign flickered every now and again, announcing an unconvincing welcome to those passing by.

To be blunt, he was a little afraid that he was about to get murdered.

Whether by Alastor or someone else, he wasn't sure. But if this was the place that his partner wanted to meet, then he'd happily… wait for him outside.

They could go in together.

And if Alastor planned to greet him with a knife, then he would just have to find him in hell and propose their partnership all over again.

When Alastor arrived, it was not with a knife, but with a cheerful tune whistled between his lips. It would've been far less unsettling if not for the dark, empty streets that surrounded them.

"Hey, Al! This uh… this is a nice place?"

Alastor paused and turned to him, acting as though he hadn't spotted Vincent as soon as he'd turned the corner. "What ever are you waiting outside for?"

Vincent wanted to punch himself.

"Oh, I wanted to make sure you arrived safely is all." He moved to his partner's side, offering up his arm.

Alastor didn't look convinced, but took the arm with a smile, letting Vincent hold open the store's door with a slight bow and a giddy grin.

The inside was just as Vincent suspected. An organized clutter of shelves and boxes, housing shellac discs from all across the Americas and beyond the pond. To the side, a tired phonograph weighed down a stack of sheet music. It was labeled by a scruffily written warning about damages and costs, though based on its dented horn and missing stylus, Vincent gathered that the sign had failed. That, or that the real music equipment was kept elsewhere.

The merchandise lining the back wall was spared from that fate. Various styles of ribbon mics, candlesticks and home radio sets perched on their shelves in pristine condition.

"Shall we, dear?"

Still attached to Vincent's arm and looking at nothing but him, Alastor somehow took the lead.

The gentle touch of his fingers through Vincent's shirt was barely felt and felt all too much at the same time.

He said dear and he meant it.

He said dear and it wasn't in the usual, friendly way that he used on strangers, or in the irritated way that he used when he felt insulted. But on Vincent, because he was his dear and his lover.

He said-

"Vincent?"

"Huh? Right- yes, sorry."

"Mr Rollie!" Alastor leaned against the counter, greeting seemingly nobody.

Vincent opened his mouth to ask, but before he could speak there was a bump from behind the counter. Then a clatter as a few discs fell from the table. In their place, a head of white hair poked up, followed by a narrow face.

With the patchy lighting of the store, it was difficult at first to make out how the newcomer's skin was unnaturally uneven - charred darker with burns running from his jaw to neck and disappearing beneath the collar of his shirt. It was only for his spindly build and eager smile that he didn't find the extent of the injuries too intimidating.

Vincent was sure he'd killed more fearsome men. Probably.

"Hiya stranger, welcome to -!"

He stopped short.

"You."

"Good day, Mr Rollie!" Alastor beamed. "I was looking to polish my old cabinet. Do you happen to sell lacquer?"

The cashier leaned against the counter, a strap of his suspenders slipped from his shoulder in defeat.

The dimples in his cheeks gave the impression that he was adapted to smiling, but the look that he now shot at Alastor was far from happy.

"You've some nerve coming back here, Al-"

"I believe your line is 'Of course, sir, what percentage of solvent are you looking for?'"

"I'll shove the solvent up your-"

"Well I'm not sure what percentage it'll take exactly, though I may need something strong enough for blood stains. All depending on your ability to accommodate, of course."

Both men stared, neither giving in.

Vincent shifted his weight, feeling like he was back in his father's office, listening to business partners argue in circles. Those conversations went over his head all the same.

"I think seventy percent would do it." Vincent chimed in, aware that he was probably lost on the point. "The higher the better though."

They both directed their stares at him, and he smiled thinly through the silence.

Mr Rollie broke eye contact first. "Fine." His flashy smiles were no match for Alastor's sinister ones. "Who's Charles Ponzi over here?"

Not wanting to be spoken over, Vincent offered a hand. "Pleasure to meet you, I'm-"

Alastor pulled his hand back before he'd finished his introduction.

"This is my associate." There was a small pause between his words. A break where most situations would call for names to be exchanged. Instead, he just said, "We share similar tastes in music."

"A match made in hell." Mr Rollie's voice drawled with bored sarcasm.

Meanwhile, the suggestion of he and Alastor being a 'match' made Vincent puff up.

Alastor met him with equal dismissal. "I'm glad you agree. The lacquer, please?"

"Whatever." Rollie took a book from the counter and ducked back under it. "You know the way."

Alastor hummed and strolled towards the shelves at the back of the store like he could've done to begin with.

It was clear that he'd only lingered at the counter to provoke Rollie, reveling in how unmannerly he could act in the presence of two fellow law-breakers. There was nothing either of them could do about it - not that Vincent would ever try.

The shelves held the specialist equipment. Neatly boxed vacuum tubes, coils of copper wire, and piano rolls leaning against a crate of spare phonograph needles.

Stopping in front of a large tabletop set, Alastor tapped his chin as if weighing a purchase. "Any thoughts, dear?"

Vincent's first thought was how pretty Alastor looked when he pointed his sharp, effortless contempt towards another man so openly - and that he wanted that look turned on him some day. This overlapped somewhat with his second thought: Mr Rollie was rude. He was disrespectful and they ought to remind him of his place.

Although, knowing Alastor though, the his attitude was probably justified.

Before voicing either thought, Vincent realized that Alastor was asking about the merchandise.

"Yes, they're um…"

The set was made of a dark and well-polished wood, carved with delicate patterns along the edges. The dials looked used - one more so than the rest -and it had not a speck of dust.

Suspiciously so.

He stepped closer.

"I quite like this one." He muttered, letting his hand drift across the grooves. "Solid cabinet… good wiring?" He knocked a knuckle against it and a hollow sound rang back. No wires.

His hand moved lower, letting him press a thumb into one of the grooves. With a precise flick, he spun in the worn dial in time with pushing on the groove.

A quiet click sounded somewhere in the wall behind the shelves.

Vincent smiled faintly.

He missed the way that Alastor grinned, but he caught his mumbled compliment. "Impressive."

Alastor disappeared into the stairwell before he could see the red erupted from his partner's ears. The simple, common praise should not have had such an effect on him.

Before following, Vincent took a moment to fix his coat and clear his throat.

"So, what was his deal?" His coat tails wagged behind him as he strode down the stairs.

The passageway was narrow and dim, made darker as the entrance closed behind him. The air smelled faintly of dust, liquor and smoke, promising an exciting night.

"He thinks I killed his dog."

"Oh."

That was a strange conclusion for someone to reach out of the blue. Alastor was far from sloppy with his kills, and more than charming enough to avoid suspicion. Either the man was completely batty or…

"Did you?"

"Yes." Alastor didn't hesitate to admit. "But I left no evidence, so I find it quite rude that he'd assume that of me."

"Why'd did you kill it then?"

The guy hadn't seemed too bad - especially for a man who's pet was murdered. And given that Mr Rollie was still alive to tell the tale, Alastor couldn't have possessed any real hatred for the man.

"Disgusting creatures. Slobbery and desperate."

Alastor stopped at the bottom of the stairs, and turned his head to watch as Vincent bumped into his back. He blinked, looking as though he'd predicted his partner's every move already.

"His was especially horrid."

Vincent didn't have much to say to that. He didn't bring up how his childhood dog, nor did he mention how he never trained it to do its business outside or not to bark at guests. He also didn't mention that he always saw himself getting another one.

Once Vincent had gathered his bearings, Alastor nodded and swung open the door.

The sound hit him first.

A steady thrum of bass lifting up the trumpets and laughter and clattering glasses.

The place was huge, far larger than the storefront above suggested - it likely stretched beneath multiple neighboring shops.

Strings of weak yellow bulbs hung from wooden planks overhead, casting everything in a warm flickering glow through a haze of cigar smoke.

Tables crowded the floor, packed with drinkers, card players, and couples leaning far too close over their glasses. Waitresses hurried between them with trays balanced on one hand, and swaying skirts bordering on indecent lengths. Beyond the bar, bottles lined the wall in neat rows, labels peeled away and their contents poured into teacups and coffee mugs.

On a narrow stage behind the crowds, a lone singer swayed lazily in front of her band. She twirled a microphone between her hands as the accompanying showgirls kept up with the beat.

"Right," Vincent began, trying not to seem overwhelmed as he fought through the crowds to keep beside his partner. How Alastor walked so confidently through the rabble, he had no idea. "You're scared of dogs. Anything else I should know?"

Alastor shot him a look.

"I'm not scared of them. I'm- Hello dears."

He lifted a hand at a group of blondes as they danced by. The three ladies giggled and lit up the moment they saw him.

"Hi, Al!"

Their voices overlapped in dizzy delight and flushed cheeks.

Vincent's eye twitched.

"I'm irritated by them." Alastor finished calmly.

Vincent could share the sentiment.

"So it drawled on you a bit," he went on, raising his voice over the music to keep Alastor's eyes on him. "Was that harder to clean than the blood?"

"It's the principle of it, my dear. When a creature's only appeal is obedience, I see no purpose in allowing it to behave otherwise."

Without breaking stride, Alastor led them to a small table near the stage. It was slightly off to the side, and reserved by a large antler centerpiece, decorated by candles which dripped wax onto the red tablecloth below.

Vincent laughed as Alastor gestured for him to sit.

"I think most people find them cute!" He had to shout over the noise now.

Subconsciously, he settled into the chair that Alastor pulled out for him. When he looked up, he found his partner with a thoughtful, amused expression.

"*His* dog was *not* cute." Alastor did not have to shout to be heard, as though Vincent was somehow tuned into his voice over a radio.

Then, he turned and began to walk away.

"I shall buy us a round."

Vincent followed automatically.

"Stay." Alastor said, without looking back.

So he sat back down. Hands folding in his lap before he even registered himself moving.

For a moment, he watched Alastor disappear into the crowd,not quite sure why he was being left behind. Without him there, the noise of the bar lacked excitement, it was both all too loud and messy whilst being but a distant, bothersome hum. The people around him were boring, laughing too hard at jokes and staring too obviously at dancers.

He drummed his fingers once against the table, then stopped himself, forcing his posture straight again. He didn't want to look like some washed-up nobody who'd been stood up.

He watched another clump of wax slide down the side of a candle and melt into a pool on the tablecloth.

"Hey! Whittman, right? How've you been?"

Vincent looked up, already disappointed when the voice was not Alastor's. The intruder stood beside their table, a drink in one hand and a sleazy grin that tried to imitate charm.

"Travis?" Vincent tried not to speak too loudly, keeping his voice pleasant and distant, partially hoping that the music would drown out his words and bore the other man away. "It's been a while. Didn't expect to see you here."

That was a lie. It was exactly Travis' kind of haunt. It was only that he didn't want to see him there.

Travis was a lousy excuse of a man who never failed to bring trouble. He dressed like a bootlegger from a cheap picture show - in shabby black coats with wide belts and low tipped hats - all to make up for his nonthreatening appearance. The only discernible feature of his was his hair: from his arms to legs to his thick eyebrows and bushy, unmanned sideburns that spilled out of his hat like straw.

He drifted from crowd to crowd, sponging off others without a shred of gratitude. If not for his friendship with Vincent's ex, Valentino, Travis would've been happy to tie him down to a tramway years ago.

"Yeah, well," he chuckled, pulling out the chair opposite Vincent - Alastor's chair - sitting on it like he owned the place. "Your lot really sank out of sight after boarding school. Thought you'd have figured all that scandal nonsense out by now."

Vincent laughed, a little stiff.

His hands itched to clutch a drink. Instead, he rested an arm in a puddle of cooling wax beneath a candle, letting the heat sink into his sleeve just enough to burn. Anything to stop himself from strangling a man in public.

Alastor wouldn't like that.

"We have a few businesses on the move," as much as Vincent wanted to, some petty comments weren't worth flaunting his father's crimes. "I took up a position at the radio station downtown. Temporary, of course. Just to keep up appearances."

"Radio, huh?" Travis took a slow sip of from his mug, smiling like he was about to say something clever. Which wouldn't be possible since he'd never done something of the sort in all his years. "Good for you. Just the kind of safe, simple role you're suited for."

Vincent sharpened.

"Better than sipping cheap giggle water alone in basements. I have rooms like this one right outside my bedroom door and booze lined up that's worth your weight in gold."

"And what businesses get you all that money exactly?"

Shit.

Before he could reply, a shadow fell across the table, jolting the candle flames.

Alastor set down two cups with careful precision, the liquid inside somehow not rippling from the movement.

He rested one hand on the back of Vincent's chair, and another on his shoulder, fingers pressing too harshly through the fabric.

Vincent straightened.

"This is my partner, Alastor Hartfelt."

The hand on his shoulder tightened.

He corrected. "Business partner. We host the weekday segments together. Ten till three. I'm sure you've tuned in."

"Can't say I have."

Travis didn't look at Alastor. How anyone could ignore such a strikingly present man, he wasn't sure. Yet he kept his eyes trained on Vincent as he continued.

"I knew you were down on your luck, Whittman, but I didn't think you'd be sponsoring this kind of company now."

Vincent was going to kill him.

Alastor's hand slid from Vincent's shoulder to slide his cup closer. Vincent took the cue, knocking the whiskey back as Alastor took control.

"Oh, I assure you," his silky voice trailed above him, breath drifting over Vincent's hair. "I'm very well sponsored."

Travis choked on a nervous laugh.

"Right. Sure you are."

He eyed Alastor's every move as he slunk toward him, taking slow steps until he was towering above his chair.

"They tell me you're having trouble. It'd be a shame if one of them found that *inconvenient*."

Travis stood, adjusting his coat. Apparently there were some thoughts beneath all that hair.

"Whatever. I'll see you around, Whittman."

Vincent pushed his chair back at once, ready to follow him. He wasn't sure what for, but he didn't want him to get away.

"Not yet, cher." Alastor said softly, dropping into his own chair and taking his cup to his lips. "Lets have him to-go."

Vincent hesitated, then sat again with a quiet grumble.

"Right."

He watched Travis wander into the crowds, irritated at the lost opportunity. When he looked back at his companion, Alastor was watching him with that amused, knowing expression.

His chest felt warm again.

Alastor took a slow sip of his drink, eyelashes fluttering against the rim of the cup. Then, without hurry, he spoke.

"While we're settling old business scores… why don't I let you hide the body this time?"

Vincent grinned.

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Vincent let out a sigh and he dropped his shovel over the freshly turned mound.

Its coffin now lay crookedly against damp grass of the Mississippi's banks, mud clinging to the wood like it would drag it back down at any moment. He'd propped the lid open against a headstone, allowing him to adjust the bodies until they settled into place.

He fixed his tie back into place and stepped back to survey the scene.

The first body, a woman with a lively face, was still stained with the blush and painted lips which made up her death mask. Her tombstone marked her passing a year ago, though she'd been positioned with such care and packaged so neatly with cotton and sealants that it was difficult to date her by appearance alone. If not for the waxen gray sheen of adipocere clinging to her skin, or the faintly sweet smell of decay as her tissues wept into the coffin lining, he might've assumed she was resting.

Haphazardly shoved beside her was Travis.

Where her muscles had been sutured into place, his limbs were left to flop apart, clumsily spreading to fill the tight space. His mouth hung slack, and his owlish eyes seemed to track Vincent's every move.

It was deceiving how a man with seven holes stabbed into his chest could look so alert.

Alastor had been watching the whole time, smiling wider whenever Vincent had glanced back for approval.

There was sweat on Vincent's back and blood drying on his sleeves, but Alastor didn't comment. The night would hopefully be kind enough to hide his appearance from any curious eyes. His attempts to wipe his hands only smeared the blood deeper into his skin. The smell of death was sure to linger, but those who recognized it surely knew to stay away.

Standing on the opposite side of the coffin - so close to him like Vincent wished he'd always be - Alastor looked perfect. Not a drop of blood had flicked its way onto his clothes or clumped in his hair. Even when he'd taken a bite out of the man's flailing arm while he was still squirming and yelling for help.

"How's that for a hiding spot?" Vincent asked, giving up on cleaning his hands.

"A little predictable, though I suppose if it's the best you can do…"

Alastor *knew* predictable. Only because he was so separated from it.

What he'd told Vincent over their drinks, was that he'd spotted Travis the moment he started towards the table. That he'd overheard a nearby dealer point him out by name to ramble about unpaid debts and bad crowds. The kind of crowds that Alastor knew how to find.

It wasn't hard to track down Travis before he reached his pickup spot.

Still, Vincent pushed back.

"Predictable? They're never finding that!" There was no way they'd connect the victim to the murderers, nor would they know which of the hundreds of graves he could be buried in. Or if

he'd even been buried in one to begin with. Besides, removing this body this way made it much easier to avoid another picnic situation. "We can't exactly eat them all."

"We could."

Maybe *Alastor could* but Vincent didn't think he could stomach it again. A nice burst blood vessel? Great. A slowly suffocating face with his fingers wrapped around its neck? Lovely. But putting those same vile people into his stomach was foul. There was a reason he wanted them dead, and it wasn't because they looked *tasty*.

"Maybe we should stick to more conventional dates for the time being." He let out a nervous laugh, hoping he wasn't jumping the gun with the suggestion. They could always start planning another murder once they found the right person.

Alastor turned towards him. "It seems so."

The Mississippi rolled past behind the cemetery. Dark water sliding slow and heavy under the moonlit banks.

Out here, the noise of the city felt so far away. And the face of his lover so close.

Vincent couldn't stop himself from placing a bloodied hand onto his partner's cheek. He was reminded of that night months ago when they'd sneaked away; both slightly cold and very drunk. Vincent had been buzzing with excitement, closer to Alastor than he'd ever been.

Only, back then, it hadn't been real. And now…

Vincent brushed his free hand against Alastor's, letting their fingers tangle on their own. He watched how his partner gazed at them in quiet interest, similarly entranced by the strange turns of the night. Vincent didn't spare a second looking anywhere but at Alastor's face: at the blood which smudged onto his cheek beneath Vincent's hand made his eyes reflect a brilliant maroon; and how his dusted freckles looked like they'd been plucked straight from the stars in the sky.

He leaned closer, moving for a kiss like he'd done so many times before to no avail.

He thought that this time, Alastor would let him.

This time, they were together.

This time-

Alastor lifted his hand between them. He paused Vincent's approach with a sidelong look and two pressing fingers against his chest.

"I admit, I haven't… felt compelled to kiss another person before."

Vincent recoiled. "No one? Ever?"

"Hm."

Alastor didn't seem to want to repeat himself.

"You kissed me yesterday…"

In the office, on a whim. When Vincent was rambling nonsense like there was no tomorrow and those lips were probably the only thing that could've stopped him in his tracks so suddenly. Without the press of his partner's lips on his, he may have been rambling all through the night until Husk found him passed out in a love-induced coma.

"I did."

"Oh." That was- he was? "Okay." Did Alastor really waste his first kiss on him? On his stupid, flustered rants and hopeless excuses? "Okay. Do you-"

"I apologize if my inexperience is off-putting. There's no need for us to continue if you-"

"Off-putting?!" Vincent barked a laugh. "Al, how could anything about you be off-putting? Look at you!" He waved his arms around frantically in Alastor's general direction, nearly slipping on mud. "You're- you're- Come here."

Alastor didn't move to his order, watching with that same analytical smile as Vincent leaned forwards. He let him rest one hand on the corner of the tombstone, leaning over the coffin to brush the curls from Alastor's forehead with his other hand.

Then, before giving himself the chance to hesitate, Vincent pressed his lips to his partner's head.

"There." He said, his body being held up solely by the tombstone as his legs turned weak. With his face so close to Alastor's, a part of him hoped that he'd lose his grip and send them both tumbling to the floor together. "How was that?"

Alastor's expression gave nothing away.

He didn't move from where he sat, trapped, despite the open land of the cemetery that stretched on behind him.

"I suppose… it wasn't so unpleasant."

Vincent frowned.

Sure, he wasn't exactly Rudolph Valentino or Clark Gable, but he'd been given his fair share of compliments from strangers and lovers alike. He knew what he was doing. Or, he knew what to do when a person was attracted to him.

That thought lingered.

It was impossible to tell whether Alastor really liked him.

He'd spent the day floating on the high of his approval, and hadn't stopped to properly consider the implications of his and Alastor's sociopathic tendencies. If Alastor wanted him

in the way that Vincent did he. Or if he was playing it out, seeing how far he could mold his colleague into a useful accomplice.

Vincent dismissed the thought, Alastor had been nothing short of chipper all night. Even if it was all an act, he somehow found that he didn't mind being used. As long as it was Alastor holding his leash.

Then, Alastor laughed.

It was the rare sound that crinkled the skin around his eyes and shook his shoulders.

With his face still so close, Vincent could see every which way that he lit up - from his dilated eyes to the twitch of his cute, pointed nose, and how his cheeks raised with their dotted freckles. He could spend a day counting those dots and tracing each one with his lips.

And *oh*, how his ma was right. Alastor really *did* fluster. With just a little moonshine and the talk of kisses, his cheeks were painted a deep shade of blood red.

Distracted, Vincent jumped when this time *his partner* put a hand to *his* cheek.

Alastor's thumb traced the corner of his mouth, teasing him into resting his whole head and mind upon the welcoming palm. And with a tug of his nail, he forced a corner of Vincent's lip up to form an uncomfortable half-smile.

"Perhaps," he murmured, barely opening his mouth. "You ought to do it again. Just so I can be sure."

Vincent didn't need to be told twice and turned his head to kiss the palm of his lover's hand.

"Maybe." He let himself be dragged back towards Alastor's face. "Or perhaps I should demonstrate how to move your tongue in someone else's mouth."

Alastor yanked his hand from Vincent's cheek in an instant, leaving him floundering from the lost support. He landed with a hand on a purpling leg of their victim, his pursed lips hovering pathetically over a mangled ankle.

Above him, Alastor was leaning on the tombstone, looking down through his eternal smile with his chin rested on a fist.

"You've ruined the moment, my dear. I'll have to pass."

"You'll pass?! Come on, this is the best part!" He clambered his way off of the body as he begged, slipping his hands over mottled, clammy skin until he was kneeling before the coffin.

"I remain unconvinced."

Vincent gripped the side of the box like the splintering wood could spare his disappointment. "Only because you won't let me show you!"

"I've seen it in the pictures, sweetheart. It's a pointless and loathsome ritual. Good for nothing but spreading disease." Said the one who had repeatedly eaten raw human flesh.

Vincent didn't mention the irony, too concentrated on ignoring how the pet name dragged his blood downwards. "Come on, Al! Just a taste, I swear it!"

Alastor stared at him boredly.

The patch of ground that Vincent knelt in was muddy from river water, and his eyes were wild with desperation. His arms shook slightly as they held him up - somewhat exhausted from his digging and holding back from wrapping around his lover.

With a roll of his eyes, Alastor folded one knee to the ground and looked off to the side.

"If you must."

Vincent beamed.

"Do get on with it."

Vincent launched forwards, taking Alastor off-guard as he grasped his face between two bloodied hands.

He didn't take the time to relish in how perfectly his jawline fit beneath his fingers; nor how the coffin beneath them provided two unwilling spectators to his pathetic affections; and he didn't dwell on how that made a volatile sense of pride swell deep in his stomach. Instead, he rushed to join their lips.

He almost believed he was dreaming. Kissing the man he loved - a man who had never allowed anyone else to kiss him, and hopefully never would. But he knew he must've been awake, because the gentle curls brushing against his hands and the soft mouth moving beneath his lips was like nothing his own brain could've imagined.

Despite his initial hurry, Vincent moved slowly. He indulged in exploratory drags of his tongue against Alastor's, desperate to prove control.

When he moved to pull away, he felt Alastor smile wider against him and follow him back.

A hand curled around his wrinkled tie, and tightened it around his neck, forcing him to fall forwards. His forearms landed back on top of the corpses, but his head just tilted further back so that his lips stayed attached to his partner's. As his elbows dug down to hold him, he heard a squelching noise, and distantly acknowledged that he'd broken a part of the decaying woman's body.

Nevertheless, he used the leverage of his elbows to deepen the kiss, moving in sync to-

"-Ow!" Vincent jolted back. "The fuck was that?!"

"You said I could have a taste, no?" His lover had a smug glint to his eyes.

Vincent could taste the iron from his bitten tongue pooling in his mouth.

His blood dripped from Alastor's bottom lip, and he watched him run his tongue over it with an agonizingly enticing drag.

"You're so fucking weird." Vincent muttered, fully aware of how his lower body was responding.

"Maybe so." The agreement came with a winning smile. "Shall we do it again?"

"Yes."

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Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the wait! Yay gay people! Everyone say thank you to Adam for being homophobic ^^ He pulled through on getting that confession rolling

Of course we can't have a date without a good old fashioned murder

Now go like my murdermedia fanart or I'll eat your organs.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!